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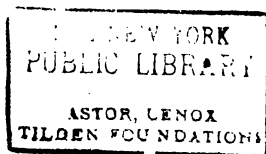
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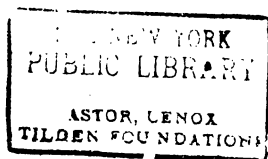
MRS. M. E. CLEMENTS

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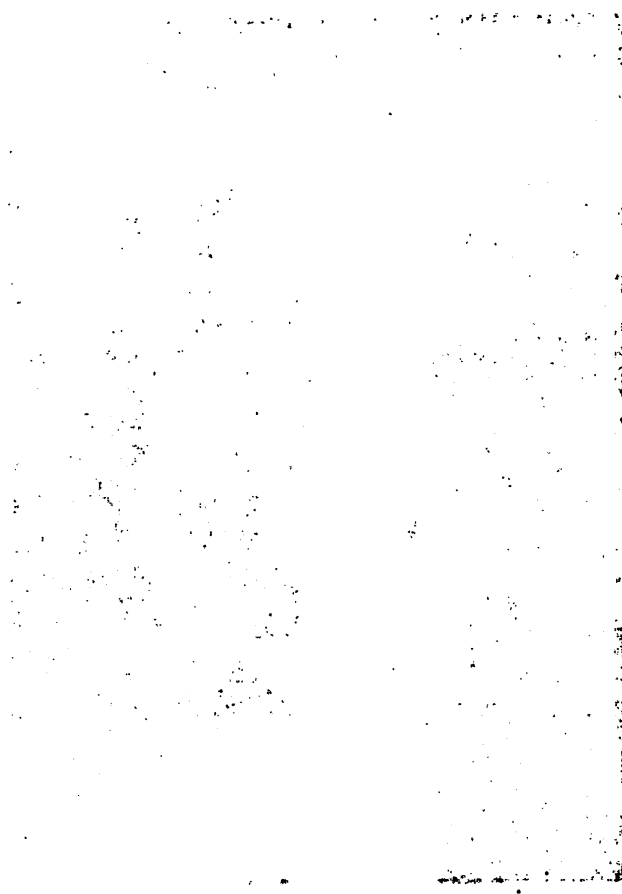
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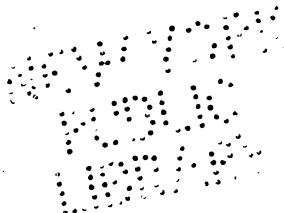
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THE DEN OF THE SIXTEENTH SECTION

BY

MRS. M. E. CLEMENTS



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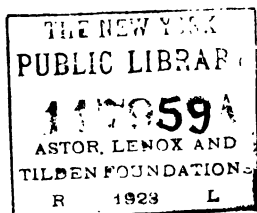
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THE DEN OF THE SIX-TEENTH SECTION

CHAPTER I

The sun cast its last soft golden rays over the bosom of Mother Earth.

The quiet shades of evening were stealing softly over the splendor of the gorgeous autumnal gold.

Slowly, and with her head bowed, a tired and worn woman walked down the road to a small house, nestled back a few hundred yards from the highway, in a cluster of Crape Myrtle, and tall maples. A few old-time monthly rose-bushes stood here and there, with a border of purple verbenas on each side of the long walk from the gate to the cottage.

As she neared the gate she heard a voice call, "Mother, do come on. You walk like you were tired out."

By this time Nina was at the side of her mother with her arms tenderly clasped about her neck, and kissing her affectionately, said:

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"You poor, dear, sweet mother, how tired you look. Come on and sit here on the cool porch and let me bring you a fresh drink of spring water. Ben and me have just filled the buckets for night."

The woman took off her bonnet and seated herself in the low rocker that had been placed for her by her daughter. In a few minutes she was back with a glass of cool water and a soft, damp cloth that she placed across her mother's eyes and forehead.

"Now just lean back and rest a while before you move, for Oh! mother, I forgot, but Mr. Allwane came here this evening for you to go over to Mr. Simpkins' home to wait on his little child, who is very sick; he said that his Aunt Betty asked that you come as quickly as you could. I know it's mighty sick, because he said it grew worse after you left, and he talked fast and excited. Oh! I do hope it will get well. He said he knew you would be tired, and if he knew just when you would be home, he would send the buggy after you."

"Oh, my blessed Father; can I? Oh! I must," her mother said to herself.

She got up, went to the little kitchen to fix a quick supper for her children before she departed. In a few minutes she had a wholesome meal. She flew around doing many little things that had to be done before she could leave. Cheering the two children as best she could, a small boy and a daughter, in her matured teens,

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with her mind so full of thought and prayers for the sick.

She changed her dress, kissed Nina and Ben, and soon was on her way to the bedside of the little sufferer.

She had worked, oh! so hard all day, rising before dawn so that she might get her duties at home done.

The children whom Nina taught kept her time well taken, and Ben must be made ready for school and his clothes must be clean and darned; his lunch fixed and this had to be done at night. Now that cold weather was near, new clothes, shoes and wraps all had to be bought. Where would she be able to get the means?

"I know my dear Heavenly Father will give me strength."

As these thoughts rapidly passed through her mind she glanced around for a moment in reverent silence. The full moon was now smiling softly and mellow here and there. A star twinkled now and then; the sound of a distant tinkle of a cow bell was heard. The song of the whip-poorwill in the clump of the weeping willows that grew near the spring, just a short distance down the hill was heard, the sacred solemnity and grandeur of the parting of the Father of Light, bowing his glorious golden head to Mother Earth, as she bade her children to prepare for rest.

Gently and as noiselessly as the unfolding of the rose, she placed a tiny candle here and there

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to guide her little ones, as she carefully spread her mantle over them, folding them close in her loving embrace.

"Praise the Lord, all that is within me! Praise His holy name, Thy handiwork is great!" She caught herself saying aloud. The hushed grandeur, the sacred benediction was inspiring to this child of God. "Nearer, my God, to Thee, even though it be a cross. Oh, Father, let me be close to Thee." This short prayer fell from her lips as she began to near the foot of the hill.

Directly in front of her, in silent grandeur and stately grace, stood on either side of a long winding lane tall oaks that shaded the roadway up the hill to the mansion.

Mr. Allwane was the richest man in the country, every one said he could coin money. Every project was successful, at every turn he made money. He was raised a poor boy, but he prospered the more. Other men tried to imitate him and failed. He was just born lucky, the people said. He was a big-hearted man, kind to all and generous to the needy. None turned away empty handed.

The little town of Allwanesville proudly boasted of a beautiful little stone church donated by him. He endowed the school so that it grew from a shabby old wooden building to a handsome brick structure. He felled the gigantic barrier between the poor children and education, giving them the opportunity of opening the doors of learning, shedding golden light of wis-

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dom into the lives of the poor, making many useful men and women.

Mr. Allwane was one of God's gifted gentlemen. He was always kind and courteous to all. He had the love and confidence of all his many tenants. His business associates and opponents recognized in him a keen, powerful and ever-alert factor.

In his early manhood he lost both parents. His father first, leaving the care of his mother to him. His father being a fine-looking fellow, married much above his station, and tried his best though never accumulated much above his little home. The loss of his father was a severe shock to this boy. He was a devoted son, and his father's wish was preëminent. So when he had to think and act for himself, it was an uphill task.

Very soon, however, he was aware that to be a man he had to work long and hard. With his mother's aid he managed to earn a comfortable living. Every night after a hard day's work he would come home, and after the usual duties in and around home was done, with his mother he would sit for hours over his books trying to learn arithmetic, reading and writing. Two nights of the week he worked until eleven, but when he came home his mother was always at the door to meet him. She would sit up and knit or embroider to wait for the coming of her darling boy.

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After reading a chapter in the Bible they would kneel in a family prayer before retiring.

He arose early and soon was off for another day's work. He was happy and healthy. Life seemed promising. He could not think of a cloud overshadowing such a glowing sun as was shining in his horizon.

He rose early one morning, and without waking his mother, he prepared a hasty breakfast, ate his, and left the coffee-pot near the fire. He stole softly to his mother's bed and kissed her lovingly and tripped out the door.

As he drank in the fresh pure air his whole being was thrilled to overflowing with happiness, and whistling a merry little air, he was soon at his post of duty.

After he had worked a few hours, his boss came around and said to him :

"Hello, Allwane, my boy, how are you this fine day ; you seem happy."

"Good morning, Captain Joe, ain't you feeling good?"

"Oh! yes; how are you getting on with your work, my boy? I know all right. You are a fine boy, and if you will keep on as you have started you will some day be a successful man. Come to my office after work hours, George?"

"Very well, captain, and I thank you, sir, from the bottom of my heart."

The proprietor was some distance from George when he stopped talking and George was

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so dazed and thankful and full of happiness that he felt like running after his new friend and verily kissing his garments.

"How proud mother will feel to-night when I tell her. Oh, you dear, good mother, I will be a fine man some day just for your dear sake, darling mother."

Standing for a few moments these thoughts and resolutions ran through his mind, and wondering what Captain Joe could want, he got himself together again and went at his work with new zeal.

Soon the noon hour whistle blew, and the hands gathered with one accord to a comfortable shelter where they ate their lunch.

During the lunch time, an old grudge between two of the men was brought up and soon they were quarreling, which resulted in blows. George sprang between them; one of them threw him back, and cursing, told him to "stand back." Meantime the other man had got a billet of wood, and with all the force he had was striking at the other's head. George instantly sprang upon him and grabbed his arm, swinging his whole weight on it, and pleading with the men not to do that.

By this time others saw the situation and calmed them. They were so excited no one noticed the captain, who was passing on his way to his dinner.

The row being quieted, the men were soon lost in conversation on things that were of in-

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terest to them, but George was full of his own thoughts. He wondered if any of the men would connect him with the fuss of those men.

George had never heard such ugly and hard words. Soon the whistle blew for work and he was too absorbed in his task to think of the horrible scene.

When the day was over George cleaned himself up, all the time thinking what Captain Joe could want with him. His sensitive nature was full of misgivings. He would start and tremble at every noise or unusual sound. After scanning his past record, and knowing he had not been scolded for any wrongdoings, started to the office of Captain Joe.

George found him alone, the old man was waiting for him. At first glance George felt like falling on his knees and hugging him, so kindly was the glance of recognition on his face. It was such a relief to George, who had imagined or fancied that something must be wrong with him some way.

In an instant he was calm and felt several years older and taller. George took off his hat with a bow and put it under his arm.

"Well, my boy," said Captain Joe, looking up from his books, "you came, did you?"

"Yes, sir, I am at your service, captain."

"Sit down, George," pointing to a chair near by.

George drew the chair a little closer, all his fears gone.

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Captain Joe looked over his glasses straight at the boy as if to size him up, and said :

"George, I have been watching you very closely for some time, and I find you to be a pretty good fellow, and I saw the part you took in the quarrel with those men. I doubt not but that for your timely bravery and thought there would have been a widow and several little orphans. Now, those are bad men."

The mention of this made George's face pale, and he moved uneasily in his chair. A flurry of misgivings flew through his mind. He did not dream of any of the bosses knowing it. He felt sure the men would lose their jobs, if known.

George was in the act of begging Captain Joe "Not to judge him with those men and to forgive him if he had done wrong."

"I am going to make a change in a place that I find the man will not do to trust. I am going to put you in his place, and if you do as well with this promotion as you did the last time I will be very much pleased. You report at my office to-morrow morning at six, and I will give you your work," said Captain Joe.

George was so dazed, so bewildered, and so thankful he did not know what to say. The future, a moment ago, was so black with apprehension in his imagination, and now all was so encouraging. He grabbed his old hat, as Captain Joe finished, and was so happy that the old man smiled and motioned him to go, as George was trying to thank him. He did not wait to

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say another word, but jumped out the door and ran home as fast as his tired limbs could go.

"What will mother say? You dear, good mother, I can see her smiling through her tears of joy when I tell her of my good luck."

The night was dark and George had some distance to walk, and as he went along he congratulated himself on his good fortune.

"George, is that you?" came a voice from the other side of the road.

"Yes; who are you, and what do you want?" The man came across the road as George finished speaking. He at once recognized one of their close neighbors who had been very kind to his mother and him. He put his hand on George's shoulder and would not let him say another word, but he calmly and as reassuring as possible said: "George, come home as fast as you can; your mother is sick. My wife is with her, she has only been bad a short time. I sent my boy for the doctor."

George did not wait to hear more, he staggered as though he was shot and ran moaning: "Mother, oh, my darling mother."

Mr. Cain following as fast as he could. George ran in the house.

At the door stood Mrs. Cain, with tears in her eyes, and as he came near she raised her hand as if to quiet him. As he passed her she said:

"Be calm, child, the doctor says there may be a slight chance—if she rallies this time."

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George gave no heed to what the woman said. He went straight to the bedside of his mother. He was so crushed with grief that he was not aware of his doings. He caught her hand and sobbed out :

"Mother, oh, mother," as he dropped on his knees at her bedside. "Mother, can't you speak to me. Oh, my precious mother, look at your boy."

The doctor was standing near and laid his hand on George's shoulder as if to soothe and quiet him.

George did not heed him, but kept begging "Mother, mother." At last he raised his head and leaned over to kiss her. As his mother opened her eyes and saw him kneeling, she said in a weak, low voice :

"My precious boy, mother can't be with you long. I am going to our Father, and wait for you. Be a noble man and do your duty. Don't grieve for me. I hate to leave you alone, sweet boy, but God's will be done. Kiss me."

She could say no more, but clasped the hands of George more closely and dropped her head. She was gone.

George knew he had lost the one and all on this earth. His head fell on his mother's body, and his grief was beyond description. No one bothered him, for some time. Then Mrs. Cain begged and pleaded with him to come and lie on the lounge and rest. Finally, after much reasoning, he got up and looked long and earnestly

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in the face of his mother, and again he took her face between his hands and said:

"Good-by, the best and sweetest of all mothers. Oh, if I could only go with you! Oh, why can't I? But you will watch for me, mother. Why did you leave me? What will I do without you? You helped me so much. Yes, I will try to do the best I can for you, my sweet mother."

Mrs. Cain took him by the arm as if to take him away. He kissed his mother again and again, as he turned to go he said to Mrs. Cain: "I can't bear to look at her any more—you will do all there is to do."

He felt, as he left the room, utterly forsaken.

After the burial service the relatives and friends began to go home. They were each anxious for George to go with them, but no pleading or begging could induce him to leave his home.

The old women would look at each other and shake their heads and say in an under tone:

"There's something wrong with that boy. I'm uneasy about him. He acts like he's not hisself. He won't eat. Poor boy. I am sorry for him. This is mighty bad on him, poor child."

Life seemed dark, indeed. He did not know what to do, or which way to turn. No light to guide him. No one to put the danger signal or to steer aloof the rocks or crags.

The darkness of the night was dense to George as he sat with his chin resting in his hand looking out the window.

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His old aunt came up and put her hand softly on his shoulder and leaned over and said in a sweet, motherly voice: "You feel sad, and things look lonely and blue, but life is sweet to live, and to please your dear, sweet mother, who is watching over you in heaven. Right now, you must put your trust in your God. Make Him your headlight. Put your shoulder to the wheel and steadily push, and it will roll. It may seem slow at first, but a child must crawl before it walks, and the hills may seem like mountains, but the axle-grease of prayer and the guidance of faith will reach the goal. Now I am going to stay right here with you. I promised your mother if she should die first, that I would see after you as best I could. So now, cheer up, and I will bring you a glass of nice, fresh milk."

Before he could hardly miss her she was back with the milk and a piece of brown toast. She simply forced him to eat. He tried to please her, but he felt so full it seemed to him that one mouthful would choke him. She kept insisting. When he had drank a little milk, he seemed somewhat revived. He looked up in her face and said:

"Aunty, you have helped me. I thank you so much. I am glad. Oh! that does not express it. You will stay here with me. If you will stay here and make this your home, and I know that you are happy, it will lift a load off my mind. What is here is yours. I can then go on with my life's work as best I can, with more

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courage. I know you are a good woman, for mother said so. Oh! God bless her—how I miss her.”

George’s eyes filled with tears as he spoke more a prayer in a hushed tone.

“Yes, I know we will be happy as birds in a short while,” Aunt Betty said. “I’m not good, but maybe I won’t break your bones when I snap at you.”

He looked at her with an amused expression—just what she wanted—and turned to go.

“Yes, aunty, you and I will make this lonely place as bright as anybody could ask. I will do my best, because I know my mother would be pleased, and I shall from this time feel that God has not quite forsaken me.”

Aunt Betty was one of several sisters, and George’s mother, in her years of trouble, had found her an ever-kind, loving and ready adviser. She had promised her that she would take her boy at her death, and seeing the boy’s aversion at leaving his home, she quietly made her plans to let him have his own way, Aunt Betty being of a disposition to first win and then rule.

Having a fondness for George in his earlier youth and a profound respect of his ability to some day be a “big” man, she busied herself to get familiar with things in general. She was indeed a domestic woman, nevertheless, far above the average in intelligence and refinement.

The ladies of her neighboring circle, or, rather,

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of the little village, was inclined to call her "stuck-up"; but she was so congenial and agreeable when they were thrown together that very soon they were all in love with her. As the gentle golden light of the morning sun on an early day in spring sheds its soft, warm rays on the dew-kissed blossoms and bids them raise their bediamond heads to welcome the blessing of another day, so Aunt Betty was unconsciously the inspiration to all with whom she came in contact. She was untiring in her interest and encouragement of George who, by this time, was quite a man. The position which Captain Joe had placed him in had been filled to the entire satisfaction, and his valued services had so increased the business of the firm, it was not long ere he was taken in as a partner. He managed to accumulate more property by economical saving and close management than seldom falls to the lot of man. He grew in wisdom and wealth as in age. He grew more ambitious; as he accumulated and prospered; came in contact with broader views and always harvesting abundantly.

His aunt was not a bit surprised as George came home from one of his trips to hear him trying to cough. Aunt Betty looked up and pretended not to notice the flush on his face, nor the roguish little twinkle in his eye.

"Why, you have been careless, my boy. I see you have a cold and you know I am always telling you to be extremely careful when you go to the city. It's a blessing I saved some of

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that cough syrup I made for Mrs. Griswold's sick child the other day. It is fine, and a stitch in time saves nine. To start in time will save you a bad spell."

"Oh, no, my ever-careful aunty, I'm all right. I was just thinking; you know, I am getting to be quite a man, and you don't have any one to keep you company when I am away, so I have been thinking some time of," he cleared his throat, took his handkerchief to wipe his forehead—

"That you have a headache," says Aunt Betty, feigning ignorance of his meaning, and so amused and tickled at his embarrassment she could scarcely keep from laughing in his face.

"No, far from that; my health is perfect. I feel as I know the brave heroes of old did after a successful deed."

"Ah, well, now my boy, I think you may as well come to the point and say, 'Aunty, I am to be married, I have won the loveliest of all the daughters of Eve.'"

George was much relieved.

"Sure, aunty, that's it! What do you say?"

"Do I say?" with an air of dignity and a bright smile on her face. "I say you are on the right track, and the sooner the better, as I know you were as careful as a love-blinded young man could be. You are what I call a farsighted fellow, and I know that you are sure that you are getting a woman and not a wallflower."

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He quickly looked at her, not knowing just how to take her hint at irony.

She was resting her elbow on the corner of the table. A ray of sunshine fell softly on her silvery hair, sending a soft glow to her face that quickly banished all fear of his good news not being perfectly agreeable to her.

"There," as he rose and kissed her soft cheek, "you are the best of all our good aunts. I am so glad that you are pleased."

CHAPTER II

Ah, listen! What does that mean? The loud, long blow of the big whistle told of something terrible. George grabbed his hat and ran as fast as he could. People were frantic, wild, running here and there, some screaming, holloing, others praying. Men with buckets of water, not knowing where to pour it, but dashing it as near the place as their demoralized brain would let them. The great billows of smoke rose, the hungry forked flames darted out like the threatening tongue of an adder. "Look! there's another house caught," and as the people looked the screams of a woman reached them. They ran, but, oh, the sickening sight. Some stopped and turned their heads. The few who kept on was carried, as it were, by the intense desire of the one preëminent thought, to save those in the

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very jaws of a horrible death. The building was completely enveloped in flames, the side that first caught was slowly falling. "Oh, save me! Help! help!" was heard from the imprisoned woman. As she grabbed her children to her, she snatched her skirt from her waist, bound the little ones together, raised them, as if to throw them out.

"Stop! Hold!" cried a loud voice.

Bump went the ladder against the side of the house. Up went a man, placed the mother across his shoulder, grabbed the children, and down he went as swiftly as a squirrel.

"Saved, thank God! Saved! Hurrah for George Allwane! Hurrah for the brave!"

The crowd quickly gathered around the mother and children, as George bore them to a place of safety and tenderly placed the lifeless form of the mother on a mattress thrown from some of the burning houses. George looked around for his aunt and seeing her at a distance, helping with a man wounded by a falling timber, went to her and said:

"Aunt Betty, Mrs. Horn, I fear, will not survive unless she has instant attention and a doctor as soon as he can possibly get here."

"Yes, dear; I think a runner has gone for the doctor."

There being only one in the little village.

When Aunt Betty stooped over the pale, seemingly lifeless form of Mrs. Horn, the other women were bathing her head and chafing her

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hands. They all looked up to catch the expression of Aunt Betty.

"Poor, dear little woman; and there are two babies, you might say, why, untie them or they will smother. For Heaven's sake, good women, some one take that poor, little darling. Mercy! it's not over two months old. This dear mother must live. Oh, blessed God, have mercy on us! Oh, Father, save this mother if it be Thy will!" Aunt Betty offered this short prayer in an under tone as she knelt and placed a pillow under the woman's head.

"Where is the poor thing's husband?"

"Some one has gone in search of him. He was on the opposite side of the mill. Here he comes—on a run."

Surely 'tis true that God doubly repays every kindness, every sacrifice in His name to even a cup of cold water or a morsel of bread.

Mr. Horn was doing for other imperiled sick.

An old invalid man was forgotten in the wild destructible wake of the rapidly prevailing flames. Mr. Horn had so much to do that he had overlooked this old man until almost too late, when he ran in the falling house and pulled him on his mattress out the door, just as the roof was falling in.

He was panting for breath when he reached the side of his wife, and seeing her so still and near death, a stifled groan broke his closely-drawn lips and he fell, rather than stooped down, by his wife, drew her head to his bosom,

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kissing her cheek again and again, begging her to look at him.

"Oh! my darling, don't leave me. Open your eyes, dear."

Smoothing her hair repeatedly, wholly unconscious of all except the one hideous thought of losing his wife. How she came so near death and he not with her when he left her only a short time ago. There was no danger now, but no one had time to think.

"Here comes the doctor—send him here."

"No, here first!" shouted the party of watchers not far off.

"This man is dying!" shouted the third party.

By this time Aunt Betty caught the bewildered doctor, looking in her direction, "come here, doctor, and I will go around with you. This business has got to have some system about it." The staid old man, of a life ripe and mellow with divers experience, had never witnessed anything so appalling in his life. As he drew near the side of Mrs. Horn a faint moan escaped her lips. He quickly administered a strong restorative, gave a few hasty directions, and hurried on.

Aunt Betty followed close to him, as fast as her age allowed her to walk.

The men were still fighting the hungry, fast-spreading flames. Now and then the brave but tired workers were sure they had the flames under control, to see, all of a sudden, them break out in a new place. The loud, commanding, but kind and courageous voice of George Allwane:

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"Pull down that wall, men! Put water there, save this if you can. For Heaven's sake, be careful!" He was helping these, and when he saw the group over there failing he would go to them and help with all his might.

Since the creation in every undertaking there has to be a guide chosen by the people or by some unseen power, one in every society, band or gathering, there must be a recognized leader, so unconsciously George, in his kind, cool, commanding forethought, won this distinction, and it followed him in after life. He dared do the dangerous deeds, and others followed. Bravely they worked, caring for the injured and moving the cripples to a further place of safety. The untiring skill and care of the kind and sympathetic doctor placed laurels in his earthly crown that shone farther than he was ever able to reach.

For weeks, even months Aunt Betty did not cease to make her daily visits to the victims of this disastrous and far-reaching destructive fire. Homes were swept away, tenants were left bare, limbs were broken, sickness caused, lives lost, and damage to the owners of the mill were driven to bankruptcy. Up rose the cry, Who did it? Where is the guilty person?

"Woe unto him whose life does aim,
Above his fellow man to gain,
Deep in the heart of some staid friend,
His full destruction to attain."

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CHAPTER III

The country was very thinly settled. Only occasionally would a traveler find a home that presented an inviting appearance.

The houses consisted of one room, with a chimney at one end, a door in the front side and a long shed room on the back side, reaching the length of the house. This served as dining room and kitchen. These houses were built of pine logs, each of a uniform size and split in the middle. They were hauled, as the settlers called it, on a large, strong wagon to the place where the house was to be erected. When the proprietor had everything ready, all the neighbors were asked to come and help. They would gather very early in the morning. The women would come to help in the preparation of dinner. Soon the work was in rapid progress.

The happy shouts, the merry laughter of the happy, busy men, as round by round the logs were placed on top of each other on the four sides. When this was done they were ready for the roof. The chimney foundation was built of rock and finished by a layer of clay, softened with water, and a layer of sticks.

The home, as the day draws to a close and the shades of night gather, is ready for a house-

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warming. The rural beaux and belles gather to celebrate the eventful occasion. The bright, cheerful wood fire in the big open fireplace, the "Fisher's Hornpipe," "Soap Suds Against the fence," and other tunes equally popular were rendered by an experienced fiddler.

"All balance, ladies to centre, gents around the outside," called a tall, robust young man, with flashing necktie, standing in the corner. This merriment lasted nearly all night, and was soon repeated at the next neighbor's house, either at a house raising or log rolling, which was, in the early month of the year an every-night affair—this was the only means available for the farmers to get the timber removed so that they could cultivate the soil. They would take it turn-about, and help each other. On these days and at night the young people would gather and have their pleasure.

"Ah! my child," says the old ante bellums of to-day as you speed along on the hard, well-kept smooth roads, wrapped snugly in your cushioned autos, or go whizzing over the rugged surface in comfortable reclining chairs of a steam-heated railroad car, "you little dream of the many hard times, the privations, the suffering, the heartaches, of we who first came to this grand old State of Alabama. This county was very thinly settled until this big mill was put there. Then the people began to come and buy the land.

There was dense pine forests here, tall and

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stately with long-spreading armlike limbs, slightly drooping in silent communion with the huge majestic oak, whose graceful branches reaching far around like a huge umbrella—a convenient and inviting resting place for the cattle on a hot summer day.

The enormous demand for timbered land was the guiding star that led Snowdon & Company to start their great industry.

As the employees began to move in they were a very assorted people. Some were very uncouth and rough, some were an average with the natives, others were of a more refined class.

The officials, or rather, the manager, with their family, found life almost unbearable, but they made the best of it. They saw the Eden of this fertile territory. Ambition never slumbers, the keen eye of gain is ever alert to its surrounding.

Not many years passed ere the fertile and heavily-timbered lands were owned by the people who came to work at the mill. As the improvement came, so came prosperity and gain to those who have blindly and ignorantly lost the golden apple.

After months of hard work and an unlimited expense the little village of Allwanesville was built.

The hearty coöperation of George Allwane, for whom the little town was named, whose personal interest was great. His keen business tact let no opportunity pass for the improvement of

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the surroundings where he had planned his future home. He had spared no expense to beautify the grounds in front of the little handsomely built church, while he kept a respectful watch over the idol of his heart, the high school.

As George was crossing the street a voice that rang through the still air like the soft, clear chimes, attracted his attention.

"Wait, papa, I am going home! I have just been to the office and the postmaster said you had just gone. Did I get a letter?"

In answer he held up a letter for her to see. At the sight of the letter she caught the strings of her sun hat, whirling her hat in the air, and humming a merry little air, went skipping toward her father.

"Oh, joy! I am so happy." Seeing the post mark and recognizing the handwriting, she exclaimed: "Papa! papa! Dolly is coming. I am so glad."

The speaker was a young lady of rare appearance, not beautiful; yes, beautiful; no, not beautiful, but—well, she is bewitching. A pair of dark, sparkling, penetrating eyes that can see to the very depth of your soul. With long, black lashes and brows that arch splendidly, becoming the tiny soft ringlets that shyly play impudently on the beautifully-shaped forehead, a mass of wavy black hair was loosely caught at the back of her queenly head, and held in place by a bright ribbon. She wore a plain muslin dress, with a knot of crimson ribbon at her waist. At

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her throat was a red rosebud. Her broad straw sailor hat was poised saucily on her head, which made a picture for an artist. As she finished reading her letter her father reached the gate, opened it and stepped aside for his daughter to pass in. Hearing footsteps behind, he looked up and said:

"Ah, Mr. Allwane, pleased to see you. My daughter, Delia."

"Miss Vining, I am greatly pleased to know you," said George in his most pleasant manner. "Truly we welcome you to our village. With one so happy and gay, as the last few moments impresses me you are, Allwanesville will have won a jewel."

"Ah, Mr. Allwane, I fear you are a flatterer," looking him straight in the eyes with a search that made George wonder. In a flash it was banished.

"We shall not be lonely, for I hold here tidings of great joy," raising the letter she had just read, "my friend and roommate at college will visit me in a few days, and I know you will be pleased with her. She is a darling." She bowed slightly and whirled round and ran up the steps.

George passed a few pleasant remarks with her father, and walked on toward home with a tantalizing impression that he could not define.

"There is something about her that keeps me on the alert," said George.

He was so much engrossed in his own affairs

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that this young woman could not make other than a passing impression on him. He little dreamed what the next few months had in store for him. He hurried home, for he knew dinner was long waiting, and Aunt Betty never liked him to keep her waiting.

"Ah, my dear aunt, I know you will forgive my tardiness when I tell you that I have just been presented to our new belle. She is charming."

"George Allwane, none of your stuff. I know your tricks."

"No, honest, my dear aunt," passing his arm around her waist and leading her to the dining hall, "she is the daughter of Mr. Vining, president of the mill, and has had the management of it since the wrangle. Miss Delia is her name, and she is just from college."

"That don't say she is young, or sensible, either," said Aunt Betty. "George, make haste and finish your dinner, as I have a sick child that I must go to see this afternoon."

"I, too, have got to go to the lower plantation on some business, and it may be late when I get back. Prince is a bit lame, and I will have to take Pet. She is fierce under the saddle. I will be back before it's very late, aunty. You need not be afraid."

The boy with the horse and buggy was waiting for him at the gate. Getting his gloves and a large, broad hat, that he used when at the farms, he called to Aunt Betty that he was gone, and out he went whistling.

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Aunt Betty hurried with the little pitcher of fresh milk, for the sick child; a nice fresh loaf of white bread that she had baked herself, and some fresh butter, for an old woman, and an invalid.

The afternoon was hot and sultry. There was no breeze. The little sufferer was tossing and fretting, his fever high, limbs and head burning and aching, when Aunt Betty stepped in with a bright smile.

"Ah, how is my little man this afternoon?" His eager eyes looked up and his little, thin, trembling hand reached for the glass of milk. She raised him up and put the glass to his lips. He drank it all. As she laid him back on his pillow, he caught her hand and kissed it, and said, "A story, please, mam."

Aunt Betty told the little fellow the story of the birth of Christ, beginning with the shepherds following the star, on and on to His death, and that He died that we all might be with Him and wear bright, shining crowns.

The little sufferer listened with bated breath. He was charmed. With a smile on his pale face he looked at his mother, who was standing at the foot of his cot, with tears streaming down her cheeks and said: "Mamma, don't you love this Jesus? Let us go up there."

The child dropped to sleep, and after bidding his mother good-by, Aunt Betty started for home.

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CHAPTER IV

"Mother, I am going to the office."

"Very well, dear."

With her parasol stretched, her white dress becomingly touched with a ribbon sash at her waist and a blossom in her hair to match, she was off. On entering the office of her father, she was introduced to his bookkeeper and private secretary.

"I am very glad to know you, Mr. Sapp. This is a little place, and we can afford to know everybody," said Miss Vining, "and then I will not die of loneliness or the blues," winking and a little mischievous laugh as she glanced at her father.

"Yes. I told you before you came that you would be lonely, if you were inclined to court and cultivate it."

"There is an old saying, Miss Vining," said Mr. Sapp, "that you can be just what you want to be, so now we shall see what you will make out of it."

"Well, how do you think you will get on, Mr. Sapp," said she, eying him with a scrutiny that cut him deep.

"Me?" said he. "Why, I shall be busy from morning until late at night, and by that time

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I hope to be so tired that I can sleep without the faintest sound of a lullaby."

"Oh, you cruel, selfish man, hoping things like that, knowing, too, that my friend will be here some time very soon, and there are so few young men here. Well, of course, I don't think you mean what you are saying."

The evening was a hot, sultry one, and they had walked out of the office to the porch.

The sun was lowering his head and the shadows were quietly falling, as Aunt Betty was hurrying on as fast as her age would allow, thinking or wondering if George went by and left word with Nina for her mother to come and care for the little sick child she had just left, when, as she went to cross the street, her foot slipped and she fell, inflicting a fracture from which she never fully recovered.

Delia and Mr. Sapp had just come out of the office. Seeing her fall, both ran. Delia, reaching her first, stooped and asked her if she was hurt badly, she and Mr. Sapp raising her. Aunt Betty tried to stand, but finding she couldn't, said, with a smile:

"Well, I believe I will have to be helped."

Delia and Mr. Sapp, seeing that her face was full of anguish, even though she smiled, asked her to let them call a doctor.

"No," said Aunt Betty, "now you catch me here," speaking to Delia; "and, Mr. Sapp, on the other side, and maybe I can manage to get home."

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"Where is your home?" asked Delia.

"You just come along, and we will soon be there," said Aunt Betty.

"This is Mr. Allwane's aunt, Miss Delia," said Mr. Sapp.

"Oh—is she," looking down at her.

She met the searching glimpse of Aunt Betty, and what she read there in the eyes that seldom ever made a mistake—that she would surely have to be very careful, but Delia could be that.

"Oh, I know Mr. Allwane will be alarmed when he knows of this," said Delia. "I fear he will think us careless for not having called a doctor."

"Don't let that worry you one second, child," said Aunt Betty. "George knows I am no baby. Anyway, he may be home in a little while."

Delia's heart leaped in her throat when she heard that.

They finally got Aunt Betty home.

"Jane, Jane! You hear me, come here!" called Aunt Betty as they came to the door.

"Yes, ma'am, I har you, missus. Ise coming jus' as fas' as I ken. Lowd a massy," throwing up her hands. "Missus, what in de worle is de matter?"

"Can't you see I am hurt. Go bring me some hot water, quick as you can."

Jane hurried away after the water.

"Come in here, both of you," opening the door.

"If there is anything I can do for you, I really

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want to," said Delia. "Are you going back now, Mr. Sapp?"

"No," said Aunt Betty, "just go right in there and rest. I know you are tired to death dragging me, as you have. Just have seats in there, and I think you will find it very cool and pleasant."

"Oh, I do wish George would come," said Aunt Betty in an undertone as she tried to turn toward the door leading to her room. "Jane, are you coming? You are mighty slow to-day."

"Yessum, Ise here now, missus." In came Jane, bringing a large tray with a loaf of nice fresh home-made bread, and strawberry preserves of Aunt Betty's own make, a pitcher of cool, sweet milk. Jane had fixed the refreshments to her own liking. She carried it with an air of dignity and pride that all could see. She thought she had done a very smart thing. As she entered the room where the company was, Delia's eye quickly scanned the laden tray. She smilingly looked up at Jane.

"Ah, how nice, and I am so hungry, aren't you, Mr. Sapp? Oh, I know you are, you needn't say or make out you are not. Surely Jane must be a fortune teller to bring just what one likes best."

"Mam, I ain't no fortune teller, but I knows what is the healthiest for folks to eat. Oh, Lawdy, is missus done fell?"

They all jumped up and ran toward the room. The sound of groaning and a heavy fall came

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from Aunt Betty's room. Jane got there first, Delia quickly following. They found Aunt Betty half on the bed. A large rocker overturned. She had fainted.

Mr. Sapp, standing near the door, told them to get her on the bed quickly, bathe her face and hands in cold water, and camphor, urging them to be quick. They were so frightened they were rushing around looking at each other, knowing that something must be done at once. Mr. Sapp laid his hat and coat off, went in gently pushing Miss Delia aside, raised and placed Aunt Betty on the bed, telling Jane to remove her shoes, while he and Miss Delia bathed and used all the restoratives they could think of and find. They rubbed and worked a long time, it seemed to them, and still no sign of recovery. They were getting very much alarmed when Jane exclaimed:

"Thank God! thank God! I see massa George."

He drove round to the side gate and jumped out of his buggy and ran in the house straight to his aunt's room. Entering, he rushed to the bed. "Oh, my dear aunt," grabbing her hand, putting his finger on her pulse and finding them weak, he breathed a sigh of relief. "Thank heavens," looking up at those standing around he raised his hat to Delia and looking at Mr. Sapp asked: "How long has she been faint?" Hearing the reply, he said: "I must have the doctor," starting toward the door.

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"If you are going for a doctor, I will gladly go for you, Mr. Allwane," said Mr. Sapp.

"The ride may be a long one, Sapp, and I hate to impose on your kindness."

"I will go," said Sapp.

"Thank you. The horse is fresh. Perhaps if you drive through town and by the mill you might run across the doctor on his evening rounds, as there is some very sick people over there."

George hurried back to the bed. Finding his aunt regaining consciousness, he dropped on his knees, taking her hand and rubbing her forehead, said in an undertone: "Oh, my God! Do spare her, if only a cripple."

Delia was standing at the foot of the bed. She had been watching his stern, set features, brown with exposure. Youth and age mixed rarely striking. She felt a pang at the indifference he showed her. She could not see the anxiety, fear and sorrow that filled his manly heart. And when he knelt at her bedside did she dream of the heartrending scene that was uppermost in his mind that it called all the strength and will power of the brave, strong man that he might control himself. She grew stronger and at the sound of his voice seemed to be conscious.

He raised his head, seeing Delia standing with a frightened expression, more ghostlike than anything else. On getting up, he said: "Miss Delia, I beg your pardon for my negligence;

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but I was so surprised and hurt at my aunt's accident, that truly I was not responsible."

"You look tired, sit here," placing a chair near the window and taking her arm, drew her to the chair, seating her.

He dropped on his knees by his aunt's bed, watching the return to life with a visible gladness that made Delia bite her lips with rage. She knew now that she loved him with her whole soul, and her jealous nature was not of the kind that wants anything divided.

"I do hope the doctor will not be hard to find," said George. "If Sapp is lucky enough to find him making a visit near by."

"Oh, I do hope he will," said Delia, rather absently. "Let's hope that he will be here very quickly."

"Do be as quiet as you can, aunty," said George as Aunt Betty groaned and tried to move.

"Bring me a glass and spoon quickly, Jane."

She hurried and was back with them at once.

He fixed her a few drops of ammonia, and raised her head. As she drank the contents she raised her head and laid it on his shoulder and said feebly: "I am glad you are back, I don't feel like myself. What is the matter with me? I did not think I was hurt much."

"I hope you are not. The doctor will be here very soon, and he will tell us how serious you are hurt," said George, as he tenderly placed her back on her pillow.

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Anxiety and fear was plainly visible on his handsome face.

Delia thought she had never seen such a face in her life. "Oh, I would give the world if I could only win him," she thought. "I must, I must!" So absorbed in her own thoughts and so deeply enthused she did not dream of showing them so plainly.

"What is troubling you, Miss Delia?"

"Me, why I am not troubled. Did I look like it?"

"Yes, judging from the expression of your face."

"Oh, I was only sympathizing with your aunt. It will be dreadful if she has a broken bone. She is so good. There is the doctor."

"Now that's luck," said George, getting up and going to the door.

"What has happened here," said the doctor as he went to the bedside. "I have heard it said that when old folks fall it's a sign of rain," smiling and watching the expression of Aunt Betty, who tried to smile also, but who was suffering. She turned her face away. This spoke volumes to those who knew her. The examination and binding was a long, trying time, and with all the stimulants it took careful nursing to bring her through.

"She will never walk again," said the doctor as he gave directions as to her care. "I can't see how she managed to be so seriously hurt,

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the fall seeming such a trifling one. I will be back to-morrow."

"Come this way, doctor," said George, opening the door he gracefully motioned him to a seat at the table. Looking at Delia, who was standing near Mr. Sapp, talking in a low tone, and placing his hand on her arm, said: "Will you honor us by sitting here?" She was not surprised. She wanted him to ask her. The very thought of sitting at his table filled her with unutterable joy.

"Certainly, Mr. Allwane, I shall be pleased, I assure you, notwithstanding my utter inexperience in this particular duty, I will do my best," taking the chair he placed for her.

Her face was crimson, she trembled from head to foot. She dared not look up or speak for a minute. Finally she forced herself to be calm. She performed her duty as well as the most fastidious housewife. The meal passed very pleasantly.

They were tired and not entirely over the excitement of the afternoon, but the perfect ease and ready wit of the doctor, destroyed every atom of embarrassment that was likely to appear. As the conversation drifted from one subject to another, the loneliness of the village was mentioned. Delia's face was all smiles and brightness, as she looked at Mr. Sapp with a twinkle in her eyes and said: "Oh, my girl sweetheart is coming to-morrow, and you may have her for a sweetheart—that is, if you be good!"

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"Judging the unseen by the present, providing the opinion be mutual, however, I accept the donation with the understanding that the party be duly notified."

"Oh, certainly," she said.

"Truly, Miss Vining, I don't feel a bit alone, nor——" said George, ironically.

"No, no, no! I am. It has ever been said of me, and I fear there is more truth than fiction to it, a bit selfish, and want the best myself," catching the tone and thinking how it sounded, her face crimsoned. She bit her lips and tried to change her words.

"No, I did——"

"Humph! Ah, I see," said Sapp, waving his hands at her; "I see. Well, I am deeply indebted to you, my dear madam. On the contrary, I feel extremely happy at my narrow escape, Allwane," looking at George. "Allow me to congratulate you on receiving such a fair jewel; eh, doctor?"

She grabbed the words, and, with an expression of indignation, looked at the doctor.

"I don't think that's fair, do you—to take a joke and make such sarcasms?"

"The hit puppy always barks, Miss Vining," said he. "We will compromise by begging you to tell us who this fair lady is that's creating so much discussion."

"I am going to keep you all guessing a while longer. I saw Nina Drewery this afternoon, and told her, but I will send her a little note as we pass where her mother is, asking her not to tell

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Mr. Sapp, and you, too, as you might pass and ask for curiosity's sake. Then I will have you," then, rising from the table, said: "I will have to say good-by, dear friends."

"You remind me of my duty, Miss Vining, by mentioning Mrs. Drewery. I was so very comfortable here, from being so sumptuously fed, that I was neglecting my duty."

"It would not do for Mr. Allwane to have us dine with him often," said Mr. Sapp.

"On the contrary, the pleasure is all mine. A repetition of this will be the only assurance of your sincerity of the pleasure you claim. Miss Vining, as Mr. Sapp claims an engagement, I will see that the goblins do not get you as we wind our way along the beautiful, moon-lighted roads."

Bidding Aunt Betty an affectionate good-by, George took Miss Vining home. As they were near the door, he said: "I hope to see much more of you from now on."

"I hope you will like my friend, but not too much," with a rippling little laugh.

"What! Like any one much when you are near?"

Taking her offered hand to say good-by, he gave it a hard squeeze, which made her wince a little.

"Oh, you naughty boy."

But he could tell she was greatly pleased.

He stopped at the gate to light his cigar, and said: "Well, as I am so near, I think I'll go to

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the office for my mail. I know Ned never thought of it."

Turning round to close the gate, he glanced toward the door, and was just in time to see Delia jump back. She had been watching him from the side transom.

"Well, I'll be dinged! She's a puzzle to me. No, my dear, I am not so easy as you think. Fine, good luck," as he drew a letter out of his box. Yet it was not the day to hear from his sweetheart. Was she sick, or what on earth could be the matter? Eagerly, and with vague anticipations, he struck a match and read the few lines:

"MY DEAREST GEORGE:

"I know you will be surprised to know that I am coming to your town to visit my friend, Miss Delia Vining. I just found out that she lived at the same place, which makes my visit doubly pleasant.

"Until to-morrow, good-by, dear George.

"Your loving

"DOLLY DEWPREE."

"Great Scott! Am I dreaming? Dolly coming, and to visit her! Impossible!"

A heavy frown overshadowed his face. With his teeth clinched he hurried out the door and home.

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CHAPTER V

"Tell me more about Jesus, Mother Drewery," said the little sufferer, as he tossed and groaned.

"Yes, my precious boy; be as still as you can, and I will sing you a little song."

"The one you sang the other night when my head hurt like it does now."

"Take this for Mother Drewery, dearie, and while I sing you can sleep."

"Where is mamma?"

"Here I am," said the broken-hearted mother, as she took the little, thin, burning hand, and raised him up.

"Mother Drewery says I may sleep if I take this while she sings."

"I hope you can rest, sweet one."

"Mamma, when I sleep this time, I will go to Jesus. I asked him to take you and me and papa and buddy up there, but I want you to come as quick as you can."

"Why, my dear, this will make you feel so much better, and then you will get well."

The mother, dropping on her knees, could not hold her grief longer. She sobbed piteously.

As he lay back on his pillow, he turned his eyes to Mother Drewery—as every one called

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her—and asked her not to let his **mamma cry**, for he was going to be with Jesus.

Seeing her grief was exciting the child, Mrs. Drewery took her by the arm, telling her not to weep, that he still had a chance to get well.

"Oh, don't let my darling die. I cannot bear it. Don't, don't!"

"Do not worry so much, just go to sleep and rest a long time," Mother Drewery said.

"You don't think him any better? Oh, Father, spare my child!" And, dropping down at her husband's knees, resting her head on his lap—entirely worn out—she dozed off to sleep.

The little sufferer moved uneasily, and old Mother was quickly at his side, turning him and replacing the cool cloth. She begged him to take a spoonful of nourishment, as she put him back on his pillow.

He took her hand and put it to his lips, looked up at her, and said: "Sing."

"All right, dearest boy; now you sleep and I will sing."

She sang again his little song:

Jesus loves me! this I know,
For the Bible tells me so;
Little ones to Him belong—
They are weak, but He is strong.

As she sang, she gathered great consolation from the words.

The father was walking the floor, his face

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drawn. A heavy frown was on his brow. His heart was heavy, and his conscience was lashing him unmercifully.

"Try to calm yourself; we are doing everything that is possible—it's all in God's hands. We must ask Him to spare him."

The mother looked up in her face, and said: "Oh, I have prayed."

"You know, my dear, if we ask in faith we will receive," said old Mother Drewery, wiping a tear from her eyes. Turning back to the child, she said: "You feel better now, don't you, dear?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Aunt Drewery placed the cold, damp cloth on his forehead, and said: "That's good, ain't it?"

"You are going to sing for me now?" He looked up at her with such a sad, pleading gaze, she could not refuse him. She swallowed and pushed the lump in her throat, and began to sing his little favorite, softly and low. He reached out his little hand until she clasped it in hers. Moving his head, as if trying to get comfortable, he said: "Old mother, I am not afraid to die. I don't want mamma to cry."

She turned the cloth on his head and kept on singing. He closed his eyes, and, in a little while, she knew he was sleeping.

She stole away to get a moment's rest. Walking through the rooms, she came upon the mother, walking the floor, wringing her hands and weeping. The father, sitting near, was trying

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to console her, looking more like the doomed one, but holding up the best he could for her sake.

As Mother Drewery entered, they looked at her, as if to get the word their hope still clung to. "He is resting more quietly, right now. I hope he—— Why am I such a fool? I think I must be turning to a silly woman."

As he gave the window a vigorous raise, he put his head out and saw the gray streaks of early dawn showing in the East. He could see the ones that he had caused to suffer; he could even hear the screams and cries on a certain occasion.

"But what has that or others to do with my trouble? The devil! What's the matter with me? I'll be d——d if I don't believe I'm going crazy," whirling around, mumbling something in an undertone.

"Did you call me, dear?" asked his wife, raising on her elbow.

"No; oh, no. You be still and rest if you can."

"How is my precious one? I really need sleep, and dear Mother Drewery, I know she is tired out. There is no telling how hard she worked all day, and then came here and sat up all night."

She entered the sick room as old mother gave him the last dose of medicine for the night.

"Do you think him better?" asked his mother, throwing her arms around her.

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"What would I do without you, dear old mother?"

"He rested better, I believe, last night, than for sometime. I will have to go now, day is here. You must take good care of my little man," she said, going to the bed and taking the little hand that was raised to her.

"You are going to take your milk and medicine, like a good boy, so that when I come again you will be much better." Stooping, she kissed him just before going.

The early morning air was the best antidote for her weary soul. The birds sang cheerfully, and the smiling face of the sun was just peeping over the hills.

All Nature seemed wonderfully happy. As she walked along, her heart and mind were full of the scenes of the night through which she had just passed.

"I will go to the spring and get a fresh drink of water. That will wake me up, and I will feel better."

She took the gourd used for a dipper, filled it, and took a deep draught, and then went toward home.

Nearing the top of the little hill, she saw the smoke curling out of the chimney. She knew Nina was preparing breakfast.

"I know she has been miserable about me all night," said Mrs. Drewery, as she went up the steps.

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Nina, hearing the noise, came to the door, and, seeing her mother, she went to meet her.

"I am so glad you have come, mother," kissing her. "Somehow, I have been so uneasy about you."

Putting her arms about her mother's waist, they went to the kitchen.

"Now, you sit here, and I will soon have you a cup of coffee," said Nina. "How is the sick child?"

"The doctor has no hopes for him, but says he may linger several weeks yet. Did you hear how Aunt Betty was this morning?"

"Aunt Betty? What's the matter with her?"

"Mr. Sapp was over for a while last evening, and said he had just left her; that she fell on the sidewalk and was very badly hurt, so the doctor said, and that she was liable to never walk again."

She told her all that Mr. Sapp said. "What do you think, Miss Vining acted as hostess, and George had to take her home. I told him she would try her best to get him. Have you seen her, mamma?"

"No, I don't think I have; but surely, Nina dear, you are too hasty in your opinion."

"Her friend is coming to-day, and a few of us are invited to meet her. May I go, mother? George is to take me. I am wild to go—I want to go worse than I ever wanted to go anywhere in my whole life."

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Her mother looked up at her in astonishment.

"There must be something very unusual about it, Nina. I don't understand your anxiety. You don't often act like this."

"I can't tell you what it is, mother, but ever since I received the invitation there has been a longing or something that I can't put out of my mind," said Nina.

"My darling child, these people all have plenty of money, and can have anything they want, and, of course, they will be beautifully dressed, and, while I know that my precious girl would be a jewel as far as personal looks go, but you know they don't care much for that; it's the fine feathers that makes the bird, and I am afraid you would only feel bad, honey."

"But, mother, Miss Vining is lovely to me, and, while everybody calls her haughty and 'stuck up,' I really think her nice as can be. If you will only let me go this time, mother, I will promise never to insist nor ask you again, if I feel as you fear I will."

Mrs. Drewery had no fears as to Nina's looks. She did not know just the nature of amusement to be indulged in, knowing that these people were not very devout in their service to God, whom she loved very much. She hesitated more for this reason than any other; still she had all confidence in Nina, but she did not want her to go where there was any irreverence.

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"If I did not have the confidence that I have in you, Nina, I would not let you go. There are a good many things for you to see and learn, and I know that you are able to take care of yourself under any influence that you are placed. You may go."

Nina clapped her hands and skipped around for joy. She hurried through with breakfast, prepared her dinner, and made the little home look extra clean and neat. She sent Ben to the spring for water for the schoolroom, while she put fresh flowers in the vases, and got her white dress ready to press. She was happy.

CHAPTER VI.

Nina was a very remarkable girl. She was held in the highest esteem by every one who knew her.

The parents of the village considered themselves quite fortunate to get her to teach their children, and paid her amply.

Since she had been large enough to help her mother, the trial of making a living was much easier, and they were quite happy and comfortable. She longed to be more efficient, and to this aim she applied every spare moment. After she was through her work at night she would sit for hours at hard study. She had been deprived of the little luxuries that count so much

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in a girl's life, feeling happy indeed with the bare necessities. She had, ever since childhood, dreamed of beautiful gowns and glittering jewels.

Her mother had banished this, to the extent that she knew she could never have them, consequently she was content to see others have them, and be somewhat reconciled to her lot.

She was very busy during the school hours, and when they were over she had to do the work around the house for her mother.

She hurried, and when her mother came home she was ready to dress. As she was placing the flowers in her hair and her mother was giving her sash the finishing touch, they heard a knock.

"Oh, mamma, how do I look?" excitedly turning to get a last glance at herself.

"You look well enough, dear; if you act as well as you look, I shall be pleased."

"There you are mother, again! Sometimes I think you have no confidence in me. You forget that I am a big girl. Don't you ever fear, my dear mother—the words that fall from those sweet lips are too sacred and sink too deep for me to ever forget." Kissing her mother, she went to the parlor. As she entered, she threw up her hands and uttered a low scream that froze on her lips, as the figure of a man, standing near the door, raised his hand in warning. The man whispered harshly as he passed her.

"Watch, listen, act, and hold your tongue," he commanded, and was gone as if he had been

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a ghost. She was paralyzed. She tried to speak, but she had no voice. She stood for several minutes—it seemed hours to her.

"What did this mean? I must go to mother," and, turning, she found that she was not really dead. She ran to her mother's room with the words on her lips. Mother was not there.

"Where is mother, Ben?"

"I do not know," said her brother.

She went to the kitchen, and as she hurriedly called was startled by a knock. "Mother! Where are you, mother?" called Nina. "Oh, mercy, I can't go to the door," thought she.

"Mother!" she called again. She was frightened, but she must not tell her mother. What could it mean?

"What do you want, child?" asked her mother, coming near. "You act like you are scared."

Nina turned, as if looking for something, to keep her mother from seeing her face.

"Mother, go to the door; some one is knocking."

"I thought somebody came in a while ago," said her mother. "I did not meet any one at the door, and there is no one in the parlor."

Mrs. Drewery opened the door, and Mr. Sapp walked in. "Glad to see you, Mr. Sapp. Come in. Have this chair. Nina will be in, in a little while."

"I thank you," he said, taking the proffered chair. "You are looking well, old mother. You

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are not losing as much sleep or working so hard."

"I am feeling very well, thank you. I don't think the loss of sleep hurts me; I find much comfort in the time spent with the sick. I learn to love them, and they me—where you feel an interest, 'tis a pleasure."

"Do you think the sick child of Mr. Simpkins will recover?"

"I can't tell. The doctor is somewhat puzzled over the case. I sometimes think he entertains faint hopes, and at others he seems utterly disheartened."

"Does his father seem to take his sickness seriously?"

"I haven't seen him around the child any, but surely any father would grieve to see their little one suffer as this child suffers; 'tis certainly trying. I am so sorry for the poor mother. She is distracted with grief. He had a sinking spell last night, and oh, the poor thing was frantic. There seems to be something hidden or a shadow about this man. Did you ever know him before, Mr. Sapp?"

"Well—as, yes, ma'am—I have seen him around the works; it seems we were fortunate in getting in with the same firm. Seeing him occasionally and making out the pay roll, the name is more familiar than the man. However, if there was ever any stigma, I don't know it. Why do you think such of him, mother?"

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"Oh, there is nothing, nothing," but she could not keep from thinking of his actions last night.

"Well, Nina, I thought you were not coming," as she walked in, reaching out her hand.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Sapp. I hope I haven't kept you waiting long."

"No, indeed; certainly not," said he. "To see one so charming as you are to-night, Miss Nina, I could wait much longer, and be content in admiring the imaginary."

"Well, Mr. Sapp, truly you are developing a new trait of character—one that does not adjust itself to the nobility of the Mr. Sapp that I know."

"Pray may I ask what that trait may be?"

She looked at him an instant, and saw in his eyes something that frightened her. She laughingly changed the subject. She realized that she had a new part to play on the stage of life; she had accepted the attentions of this man because he was a gentleman, so every one said, and he would read to her, and he could interest and amuse her for hours narrating his travels. She was glad to have him occasionally. His varied experience was nectar for her hungry mind, but, with his gentle appearance and highly cultured brain, she felt deep down in the hidden recesses of her heart a profound, frightful aversion for him, and now that she realized what this unexpected new world held in store for her, she was frightened and felt like flying from herself as she would from some hideous con-

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tamination. "Oh, God, help me!" she thought, as she rose to play a favorite ballad of his.

CHAPTER VII.

The soft light of the silvery moon and the twinkling stars studded here and there, shed a kindly light on two men deeply interested in conversation. Sitting close to each other, well secluded by the dense foliage of the low growth of oaks in a very unfrequented spot, they commenced their conversation in a low tone.

"How in the very devil do you think I can live on such promises? I have done the last thing that I expect to do until you come across; you hear?"

"Oh, hell, Simpkins, you know I will do just what I promise."

"Yes, but a fellow can't sell his honor, freedom and happiness for promises can he? And I am getting mighty sore of the game, you hear? I think you will have to get another sucker, Sapp."

"You are just worried to-night, old boy," said Sapp, seeing the expression of the face that drew close to his. "You are too much of a man to foil me at this stage of the game."

"Too much of a fool, you mean, Sapp. I feel meaner and lower than the devil to go home and have the pure, sweet lips of a confiding, innocent, dutiful wife touch mine, one that kneels

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before her God and begs piteously for the release of my charred and blackened soul from the eternal, damnable doom that I justly deserve."

"You are getting sentimental in your old days, Simpkins," trying to treat him as lightly as the hideous scene of the past would allow his conscience to.

"You will have as much religion as old Mrs. Drewery. The next thing I know, you'll have a long-tailed coat, a high hat, a Bible under your arm, and be going around preaching. Don't be a fool, old boy, and let a little tomfoolery and rot get you addled," slapping him familiarly on the shoulder. "You are worried and tired to-night, old fellow. Meet me here again—eh! what's that?"

Both men jumped up, looked and listened a moment. Hearing or seeing nothing—it was just a dead limb that fell, they decided—and cautiously walked to the road.

"Can you be here at this same time to-morrow night?"

"I don't mean to move one step more until you have come across." He looked savagely into his companion's eyes. The expression carried his meaning better than scores of words.

Sapp, seeing that further evasion was useless, said coaxingly.

"Old boy, I am busted to-night. Can't I hand you some a day or two later, or when we meet again Friday night?"

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"No, you can't; didn't I tell you that just now? I mean that thing and the sooner the better. You know me, Sapp. I feel as desperate as a man can, and I won't be played with, so hand her over," stepping menacingly closer.

"This is the last cent I have, Joe. I have had tough luck lately," handing him a small bill. "I will have more soon, and will make you feel good by handing it to you at once."

"Is this all?" crumpling it in his hand and hissing, "this is the last time I will be put off. I mean it. Do you think me a cussed fool?"

"Oh, no, old boy. I know of no other man with half so much good, sound, common sense and judgment. You know how much I depend on you, Joe. Now don't forget the time of our next meeting."

"Good evening, gentlemen," said a clear, distinct voice.

The two much-surprised men looked around as the figure passed them, rapidly going up the road the way they intended going.

"Who was that, Sapp?" asked Joe Simpkins. "And where in the devil did he come from? Did you hear any one coming?"

"No, but I suppose we were too busy talking."

"I am sure we said nothing for anybody to pay any attention to, but we must be very careful," said Mr. Sapp, looking uneasily up and down the road.

"Oh, pshaw! That was some of the hands from the mill."

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"I hope so. I couldn't see who it was—they seemed to be in such a hurry," said Simpkins.

"I have to be going, now. It is late, and I have an engagement, so good night, old boy. Don't forget the time."

"Nor don't you forget your promise, either. I am in no joking mood," said Mr. Simpkins.

He turned away from his companion, very sullenly and abruptly as he hung his head and walked slowly toward home.

Mr. Sapp stood, irresolute for some time, watching him, and wondering whether or not he meant what he said.

"I must surely keep him quiet and feeling good. My God, that will never do. My plan must be carried out."

Taking a cigar from his pocket, he lighted it, and walked on in deep thought. He looked at his watch and hurriedly thrust it back into his pocket.

"I am late now."

He went to his room, made a few extra preparations, and was soon at Nina's home, quietly waiting for her in the little sitting-room.

Judging from outward appearance, the Angel of Peace and Purity would blush at comparison. There was not a trace or shadow of sin or immorality on his handsome face.

As Nina turned to the piano, she glanced at him. She shut her eyes for a moment to blot out, if possible, the rapid alternating thoughts that simultaneously appeared in her imagination.

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She was not conscious of the song. She sang from sheer habit. As she sang the last strain of "Then you will remember me," he rose and came over to where she was seated, and, looking down in her face, said:

"Oh, did I frighten you, Miss Nina?" while closely watching her.

"Certainly not; why do you ask?"

"From the way you jumped."

"That's more of your imagination, Mr. Sapp. If we are going to be numbered among the happy throng this evening, it is time we were going."

"I wouldn't miss this anticipated happy event, for I know it will be deserving of all the happiness your fanciful memory can possibly exact. Madame Rumor has it that Miss Vining is unequaled as an entertainer.

"I know I will be supremely happy, as I have never been to anything so high-toned as this before, and, of course, wholly ignorant of its demands. Therefore, I am prompted by the dictates of my society self, to be at ease as much as the unsophisticated real one will permit. I will be sincerely indebted to you, if by chance, I—err, if you will, in some kindly way, put me right. I—I feel all nervous. I can't understand it. I have been so very happy, and now even as we near the house, a vague something tells me I shall not be happy."

"Indeed, Miss Nina, I shall begin to think you a distant cousin of some future predicting old

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woman, priding herself as the possessor of the knowledge of some coming calamity."

"Now, you must be careful there, Mr. Sapp, for above all detestable things, I hate the thought. There once lived in this community an old lady who pretended to tell fortunes, and great crowds would go there to get their future read; it was fun, they said, but I felt such an uncontrollable horror of it that I was afraid to see her. My mother nursed her when she was sick and until she died. Mother said she was a dear, good old soul, and that all was false, but I could never think of her as anything else. So please don't even insinuate a comparison."

"I shall hereafter endeavor to avoid any reference to the subject in your presence," said Mr. Sapp, laughing at her heartily.

"Oh, how beautiful!" she clapped her hands and exclaimed, as they came in sight of the home. The merry laughter mingled with the unrestrained happy chorus of voices. The broad porch was brilliantly lighted with gaudily decorated lanterns, with here and there the green leaves nestled 'mid the broad arching branches of the stately oaks that stood as protecting sentinels just in front of the house, presenting to the approaching guest a panorama of dazzling splendor.

After she was presented, Nina and Mr. Sapp walked leisurely from object to object of interest and beauty. Feeling a little tired from the day's work, and wanting to be alone for a while,

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she begged him to leave her, and she found a seat partially hidden back of a bank of flowers that gave her a commanding view. She was delighted to have a few moments to herself. She wanted to think. It was so beautifully new. She sat there as one wholly entranced, drinking into her hungering, anxious soul contentment.

As the guests passed to and fro, their happy voices and merry laughter mingling with the lively music, she heard the arguing of the couple just a few feet from her, not dreaming that they knew she was there, and, being ignorant of their subject, she sat still. As they talked on, she became interested as she heard the lady say:

"Oh, you can't fool me."

"Why do you think me trying to fool you, because you won't own up to what I ask of you."

"Well, truly, my dear, I don't quite understand you," said he.

"Indeed," said she very sarcastically. "Will you tell me where you were just before you came here?"

"Certainly, certainly," said he, turning pale, and with a quiver in his voice. "I was at the office and immediately before coming here, I, of course, was at my room. Why are you interested in my movements, may I ask, Miss Vining?" said he very indignantly.

She raised her eyes with a knowing, mischievous wink and a merry laugh, that made him feel very unpleasant. Rising to meet one of her guests, throwing her head back and looking im-

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prudently at him, said: "I will see you a little later, Mr. Sapp, and conclude our talk."

Looking at her companion, she said: "I am trying to convince him that the improvements of this section in the last decade is more marked, and especially are the visible strides in education more than in any other parts known of at the present time. All honor and praise to the monarch of our success," addressing the last remark to Mr. Allwane, who was approaching.

Seeing Nina still seated, he went toward her.

"Why are you so still?" reaching his hand to her extended hand, as they met with a warm, friendly grasp.

Miss Vining turned to see where she came from. Her face blanched as she caught Nina's glance and turned away, calling Mr. Allwane to come with her to find the one who had kidnapped Dolly.

Nina looked after them for a moment.

"What on earth does this all mean? How well you look this evening, Miss Drewery. What is it that is so impressive? You are not your jolly self," said a young man, coming up, one whom she had known for years.

"Oh, yes I am, Ralph, because I am not always laughing you think me sad; far from it; on the contrary, I am jubilant. I am intoxicated."

"Gee! Miss Nina, are you? You had better sit down again. I thought you looked like as if

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something was wrong," said Ralph, raising his hands to catch her if she fell.

"No," said Nina. "I can stand, thank you," laughing heartily. "I am not quite so bad."

"Oh, pshaw! you are joking, Miss Nina."

"Well, in the sense you take it, I certainly am joking. I am surprised at you, Ralph, knowing me as you do."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Miss Nina; but you said you were intoxicated, and I thought it meant drunk, and you know, since this new-fangled society is so much you don't know people, but I know you, Miss Nina, and you know me, too, and that is why it scared me so. I didn't know but somebody played a joke on you."

"Don't be uneasy about me, Ralph," said she, turning to go.

"But if you ever need a friend, you know old Ralph Jopin is one; you hear?" said he, following her a step and whispering.

"All right; thank you, Ralph."

As she walked slowly toward the dancing hall, too deeply engrossed in her own unhappy thoughts to heed the doing or manoeuvres of those around her, and humming the air just played, Mr. Sapp came up.

"Where have you been, Miss Nina? I have been watching for you some time."

"I haven't been very far," said she, laughing. "Are you sure that you have been looking for me? Oh, I don't mean to doubt you, I hap-

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pened to be not very far from here," seeing the expression on his face. "Oh, Mr. Sapp, don't you think Miss Dupree beautiful?"

"Yes, ma'am; but I have seen others far more beautiful."

"Surely not many, I am sure. She is far more beautiful than any woman I ever saw. See those eyes! How they speak volumes at a glance. They pierce the very uttermost recesses of your soul; those lips and the sweet smile she wears are ample to arouse the love and admiration of anything human. Indeed, I am deeply in love with her. I am not surprised to see Mr. Allwane so seemingly happy. They will make a handsome couple, won't they?"

"What do you mean, Miss Nina? You speak as though they were engaged, or to be made one in the very near future."

"For mercy's sake, Mr. Sapp, surely you are not so secluded, or so well barricaded against the familiar angels of 'Madame Rumor' that the noise of their approaching wings does not disturb your repose."

"Oh, certainly I have heard that Mr. Allwane was in love, but I had no idea that she knew this was her; in fact, I paid little attention to it; you always hear such about one so much sought as he is."

"He is indeed a noble man, and any woman should feel her castle bedecked in the most gorgeous robes of true manhood could she capture him. I have known him all my life, from a

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very poor orphan boy, and I don't think there has ever been the least stain on his name."

"I shall feel jealous if you continue in this elaborate praise."

"Well, I am sure I feel that if you knew of his repeated kindness to my mother and me, that you would dub me as an ungrateful, unworthy piece of clay should I not act as his champion. There is no use repeating that I would guard him as I do my own brother. There is very little that I can find to do for him, but I pray my blessed God that if there ever comes a time that I may have strength to show him that I am not the piece of unappreciative womanhood that I fear is stamped preëminently on his mind."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Nina, indeed I do. You are more estimable since the facts promote the action. Here they come. Aren't you going to whirl a few times, Miss Nina? I won't tell on you?"

"Can't you persuade her, Mr. Sapp?" said George, as they approached, laughing heartily. "You dance, do you not, Miss Drewery?"

"Call me Nina, please, Miss Dupree. I love you already, and 'Miss Drewery' seems so very distant."

"Thank you, my dear Nina; since you make so candid a confession, I believe you will endeavor to enhance this estimation."

"She is worthy of fabulous hire," said George.

"I must ask this favor, Miss Dupree," as she drew Nina close to her.

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"What is it?" looking sweetly in her face.

"That you allow me to hold George as the same big brother that I have been accustomed to."

"Ah," with a ringing laugh, "you have my unbounded approval, my dear."

"Oh, thank you. Now we understand each other, don't we, dearie?" as they clasped each other's hands and walked off.

"I wonder what you two are cooing and plotting about here. Don't you think this lovely, Nina?" said George.

"Dolly has the greatest mania for a contrast of any person I ever saw," said Delia, turning to join others standing near the door. "I will be with you in a short while, dearies."

"Have you known Mr. Allwane long, Miss Drewery?" said Dolly.

"Ah, hush," said Nina, laughingly placing her hand over Dolly's mouth. "You remember your promise."

"Oh, I truly beg your pardon, Nina. You must not be too rigid; when a few days shall pass, I am sure I will not err."

"Yes, ma'am; I have known him from my earliest childhood. He is so noble. Oh, I love him as a brother. I was speaking to a friend just a while ago, and he seemed astonished that I should exalt him with such adoration. But when you know him as we do, you will certainly agree with me. He seems to be a remarkably generous man."

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"Here you are, still cooing. I shall be jealous in a little while, if you two don't be careful. I am the one to be aroused."

"My dear Delia," said Dolly laughingly, "oh, never fear, my love, I should be as happy as a bird if my claim were as secure as yours, judging from present appearances."

The ironical tone of Delia's voice caused the two ladies to look, but she seemed the very essence of truth. Nina knew there was a deal hidden in those assuring tones, and resolved to watch with interest the coming events.

Turning to go to the dancing hall, Delia passed Mr. Allwane and others engaged in a merry conversation. Biting her lips and clinching her teeth, she murmured, as a quiver of intense anger ran over her:

"I will not give him up. She shan't have him. I must arrange to get that man in my power."

"Oh, what is troubling you, Miss Vining?" said a guest, as she entered the room. Quick as a flash, her face was all smiles, and replying:

"I was never happier in my life; I hope you are happy."

"Well, Miss Vining, I think if you want to be happy you can be."

"One is what they wish to be, 'tis said, and I agree heartily with the poet."

"Well, I don't; I don't think you do either, deep down in your heart. That is all stuff. Don't you know that no human would ever be unhappy if they could help themselves? I know

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this, that when you are unhappy it is a sensation from which the mind could readily dispel its gloom. The shadows that are allowed to stretch their weighty folds around will hastily grow more dense, and soon the glass will be wholly blackened. The interest and love we have for our loved ones and friends is fertile soil for the prolific seeds of sorrow and unhappiness. It's only the sorrows of others that cast their shadows o'er us. Don't you agree with me, Miss Vining? Are you not sure that it is the anxiety of others, or rather, about others, that cause us trouble, and not the cares of self? While we grieve for them, some one else does the same for us."

"No, I still contend my point."

As the music started a popular air, they were astir hunting their partners. Soon the happy throng was lost to everything else but their glorious hallucinations, when at length the whirl changed partners and promenade was concluded. "Home, Sweet Home," was played in the final cheerful wind-up.

Miss Vining placed a note in Mr. Sapp's hand as she conversed gayly with her partner. After the guests had departed and quiet reigned everywhere, Nina, who had returned home and gone to bed, lay dreaming of her noble knight and her sweet, loving Delia, whom she loved and trusted with all her pure, innocent nature:

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CHAPTER VIII.

The stars gave a dim light. The full moon was low in the west, hidden by the fast gathering clouds. Standing far back in the shadows of a huge honeysuckle vine, that had been trained to form a screen, with a dark shawl thrown over her head, covering her snugly, she waited for only a few moments, when she heard steps approaching, and, peering in the direction, saw the one for whom she waited.

"Did you want me to come here, Miss Delia?"

"Certainly, Mr. Sapp; you came ostensibly, and I am truly glad you did not fail me."

"Indeed, Miss Delia, if there is any service I may render you in an honorable way, I will gladly serve you."

"Oh, thank you, so much, Mr. Sapp; but first I ask you to please be careful of your voice."

She gave a soft, low laugh, watching him closely.

"What, you surely can't be personal in your remarks. If so, I demand an explanation."

"Perhaps I am, or perhaps I am not, but we won't be cross, will we? There is too much at stake for any such misunderstanding. How is——"

"I suppose he is very much worried over his

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child's illness. Yes, I think he is pretty sore with me because I could not give him some money a short time back."

"Of course you did."

"I am not a moneyed man, Miss Delia, and with the limited salary I get, I can't have very much surplus. He is now much indebted to me, and I owe him nothing." Again he flinched, shifted his weight from one foot to another. Could she have seen his face, she would have gloried in seeing him turn deathly pale and then crimson. But threatening peals of thunder and the rapid approach of an angry black cloud cut short their interview.

With a hurried "good night," and a faithful promise to be at the same place on a fixed date, she ran in and softly entered her room and hurried to undress, feeling sure that Dolly was sound asleep.

She felt safe from suspicion, but as the wind and thunder grew louder and more threatening, she was awakened, and, jumping up, ran into Delia's room, much excited.

"Oh, Delia, dear, do you think we will be blown away?" grabbing her around the waist, as if her friend could shield her from danger.

Delia was so calm and composed that her friend was struck, and began to notice.

"Haven't you been to bed yet, dearie? You have not undressed."

"Oh, certainly. What a sweet, thoughtful darling you are."

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"Help me to be good. I pray to be good. I want to be all that a noble, sweet, good woman can be. I want to live so that my dear George will be proud of me. He is so noble and good. Don't you feel proud of me? Oh, what is the matter, Delia?"

Looking up into Delia's face, she saw a dark, ugly frown, and instantly a deathly pallor that made her start and ask:

"Can't I do something, dear, for you? Let me bathe your head with some camphor."

"Oh, no, child; there is nothing the matter with me."

"Yes, honey; surely you must get in bed this minute. I fear you have overtaxed yourself this evening. The strain of entertaining was too much for you, dear."

"Dolly, don't be alarmed about me. I assure you that I am all right."

"Oh, I am so glad! You had such a frown on your face, and suddenly turned so pale."

"Pshaw, you are so absorbed and transplanted in your knightly lover, that you are imaginary. I believe the wind and rain was more threatening than real. So I think bed is our best place. Are you sleepy, dear?"

"I can't sleep; I feel as wide awake as at noon-day."

"Well, for goodness sake! I hope if I am ever in love I won't be as sickening as some I know."

"Do you think me that way?" said Dolly,

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stung and surprised at the cutting tone of her friend.

"No, no! Not in the least. I was thinking of Mr. Sapp and that Nina Drewery."

"Oh, I am so sorry you are worn out, dear. I felt like I could talk for hours. I hope you will feel better to-morrow."

Dolly rose to go. Delia drew her close and kissed her repeatedly. With a sweet "good night," and a smile that only she could give, she sent Dolly to bed with all suspicion of personal injury entirely banished.

When Delia was alone, she gave herself up to the thought and plans that had been preëminent in her mind for some time. She rolled and tossed in her bed.

"Oh! How I hate her! I did not think he cared so much. To-night when I saw him look into her face and smile, I knew he is as truly in love as she is. If Sapp will only agree to my plan, I will feel that some of the barriers are removed."

The clouds had disappeared, the hushed stillness just before the birth of the golden dawn, came ere the troubled and distorted brain could find calm enough to sink into a troubled sleep.

The sun rose in all his gorgeous glory. The merry song of a bird wafted on the gentle morning breeze through her window, bidding her rise and drink deep draughts of the happiness God freely gives to his children.

Dolly rose, made a hasty, but very becoming

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toilet, looked in on Delia with the words on her lip to wake her, but seeing how pale she looked, stooped and kissed her forehead, softly and tenderly, turned and slipped out.

Delia threw her hand out and exclaimed in her sleep: "Dear George!"

Dolly stood motionless for a moment and walked out.

Going out on the porch the warm, inviting sunshine quickly dispelled the gloomy surmising that were tapping at her heart's door, and she began singing a merry little tune.

As she walked round toward the kitchen that was built a few yards from the house, she saw Mrs. Vining in the back yard feeding the chickens. She went to where she was, taking some food in her hand, kneeled down and soon had the pets on her shoulders and eating out of her hands.

After a while spent with Mrs. Vining and finding that it would be a short while before breakfast was ready, she walked down the street. It was more of a country road, being on the extreme side of town not very much frequented.

Humming a familiar air, she walked leisurely on, thinking of and admiring the beauty of God's handiwork, oblivious of the roar and strife of the great world of men and women.

Coming to a row of houses, whose very appearance bespoke the element of the man and woman who resided there.

They watched her as she passed.

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She spoke pleasantly to them, and even patted the little one on the head who ran and climbed on the gate when they saw her coming. As she passed she heard them remark:

"That is one of them 'stuck-up' rich gals that was up to that frolic, the boss' gal had last night. She has more heart in her than his datter. I'll bet she wouldn't a-spoke much less a-touched that ar' youngun. I wonder who she is."

Dolly's heart ached as she heard these words, and she resolved to see more of these people, she went on thinking how strange that every one did not love her Delia as she did.

In passing several houses she came to one much nicer and aloof from the others. As she neared it she saw a splendid horse and buggy standing in front. She was interested in the passing to and fro of the inmates, when she was startled to hear her name spoken. Looking around she saw George Allwane coming toward her.

"What are you doing so far out so early, my dear?" taking her hand in his and drawing her to the gate.

"What are you doing here so early yourself?"

"I have been here since midnight. There is a very sick child here."

"You came to help nurse it."

"Yes; I came to help or try to relieve the old lady who has watched over it for weeks. She is a dear old soul. I had my buggy to take her home if she can get off from the child who clings

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to her and won't let her leave him a moment if he can help it."

"Can't I go in—I want to see him?"

She was past him ere she spoke, and going up the steps looked to see if he was coming. She waited and asked him to introduce her, saying, "She would take old mother's place if she could."

George, looking down on her, thought her more beautiful and sweet in her simple muslin dress of plain white, with a bunch of bright-colored wild flowers at her throat.

"I was thinking of inviting you to go with me to the farm to-day? I will take old mother home and come for you."

"But won't I be needed here," said she, looking up in his face pleadingly. "I know she needs rest, and I will stay and relieve her if you think best. I want to go with you; it would be infinitely more pleasure, dear George, but this is a duty. I will leave it with you which I must do."

He stood for a moment.

"I won't say I will submit to your dictations."

He watched her closely and saw plainly the battle betwixt pleasure and duty raging in her bosom.

"Why should he leave her there to worry over the sick child?"

The day was bright and cheerful. The thought of having her near him, to gaze into her deep, blue eyes, was a pleasure. His first impulse was to say: "No, dear, I think you too

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pure and sweet to stay here; come with me, that I may protect my darling from all things unpleasant."

Seeing the tired, worn, resigned face of old mother smiling through her weight of weary burden, she extended her hand, saying: "I know this is the precious face I have so longed to see. This is my boy, and naturally I will love who he does. Nina came home last night bubbling over with admiration and love. Dolly, somewhat abashed from the frankness and unusual sincerity of her new friend, did not reply at once.

Glancing around, as if to grasp a reply, George said:

"We were debating, old mother, whether she should go to the farm with me, as I am anxious for her to do, or remain here and relieve you."

Dolly, looking into the kind old face, quickly said: "I will go with you some other time, if you will be good enough to take a little note to Delia. I will stay a while here."

Taking the offered pencil and memorandum book, she sat down near by and wrote that she would not be home until late that afternoon, explaining why she did not return for breakfast.

Old Mother's face was bright with a smile as she pressed a kiss on Dolly's delicate pink cheek and asked God's blessings on her. Putting her arm around Dolly, she drew her to the bedside of her ward, and, bending over, told him "that a dear, sweet friend, had come to spend the day

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with him, and would sing sweet songs and tell nice little stories. Won't you be glad?"

"Yes, ma'am. But you won't leave me, will you?"

"I have to go home for a little while, and then I will come back to my sweet boy."

The forsaken, sad expression on his face brought tears to her eyes. She left the room, and was soon speeding homeward, stopping to deliver the note.

Delia was standing on the front porch, watching for Dolly. She came to the gate as old mother stopped.

Reading the note, a thrill of delight flashed through her mind.

"Well, Mr. Allwane, I will admit my lack of beauty, compared to my friend, but I assure you my sense of appreciation, and admiration of the beautiful and lovely is far greater than any one of your honored acquaintances."

"Truly, Miss Vining, I beg you to explain. I am at a loss to fully grasp your meaning."

Throwing her head back, she laughed heartily, as Mr. Allwane came up in the buggy. "I mean that I would enjoy a drive to the country immensely. Is my invitation accepted?"

"Certainly, Miss Vining. When will you be ready?" asked George.

"In a few moments," said she.

"Well, I will take old mother home, and return for you." He drew up the lines, drove off, and was soon lost to her sight.

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She still held the note. Looking down, she scanned the contents, full of endearing words, and hurriedly formed her plans. The note was begging that she and her mother pardon her if she inconvenienced them at breakfast.

"Umph! I can read her. Oh, you shy puss! You think you will pass as a good thing, but I will see. You feel sure of your prize. Ha, ha ha!" sounded the shrill laughter, as she danced around. "I will show you, my little lady; I shall use this day for my own cause."

The wicked, designing touch of the demon Jealousy had seared deeply the heart and shone exultantly as she ran up the steps. Handing her mother the note as she passed her in the hall, she went hurriedly to her room.

"Are you going out, Delia?" seeing her with hat and gloves on as she came down.

"Have you, too, decided to visit the sick? I am so pleased to see you do this. From what papa tells me, he is having trouble with his men, so many have sickness in their families, and, of course, lose time. You can do a world of good, precious. If you are going this way, you might take that poor old soul some fresh milk. Oh, how I wish I could go," sighing deeply as she looked.

"Mother, who are you talking to? I'll tell you, if you think me crazy enough to go chasing over this place to wait on these heathens, you are sadly wrong," drawing herself up, as if

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to convey more emphatically her aversion, with an expression of mingled contempt and sarcasm. "I have something preëminently more entertaining and pleasant in view, at present."

"My own precious child, that is not you speaking? I am so grieved to hear you speak so."

"Grieved, my mother, because your daughter will not condescend to wear her strength away, shatter her already tottering nerves, dislocate her threatening spinal column and absorb enough germs to infest my own loved ones? Charity begins at home, so I learn from The Book."

"Admitting the danger of contagion, my child, I know there are within reach disinfectants with which you could fortify yourself, and, furthermore, by a liberal use from a proper source would perhaps check the spread of the malady."

"I must confess the care of and use of your antidote, mamma, must be trusted to more competent and willing hands than mine. I repeat, my time is more pleasantly taken; make your suggestions to Dolly. Judging from her start this morning, she will be more acceptable than I. For, to me, the thought is repulsive."

Seeing the pale, drawn face of her mother, she quickly asked:

"Are you feeling strong this morning, mother? Mr. Allwane insisted that I drive with him to the plantations this morning, but if you are not well, I will decline the invitation."

"I am very well, dear, and want you to go, by

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all means. It will do you good to get the sunshine and fresh air, and rain, too, won't hurt you."

With a rippling laugh, she whirled around to adjust her hat in the large mirror close by.

"Here he is now. Isn't he grand, mamma? Isn't he handsome?"

"Yes, I know Dolly is proud of him," said her mother.

Delia did not reply, but, biting her lips almost to bleeding, with an angry flush on her face, she walked out to the buggy, deeply absorbed in reflections.

"Did you think it took me long?"

"No. I drove by to take Dolly something to help while away the time."

"How thoughtful and kind of you. I know she will appreciate it. The day, no doubt, will drag, not being familiar with the duties of a nurse, she will be sick, I fear. Had she let me know of her intentions, I surely would have begged her not to undertake the day alone."

Seeing that the robes were well arranged, they waved her mother good-by, and were gone.

CHAPTER VIII.

Dolly went to the bedside of the child with a smile on her face. Seeing the frightened and embarrassed look on his face, she took his little hand in hers, and, dropping on her knees, soon

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had him very friendly and contented. She amused him all she thought his strength could stand, and once when she was narrating some funny little child's story he laughed.

She made herself equally as agreeable to the tired, worn mother, and, seeing the heavy hand of sorrow that had planted deeply his lines and shadows, her sympathetic nature, quickly responded, and before the day was gone there existed a bond of sympathy between them that ripened with Mrs. Simpkins into a trusting love and to Dolly a tender, watchful care.

Dolly was reared in the lap of luxury, indulged by a doting father, petted and fondled by an ambitious, idolizing mother, and had every opportunity of being one of society's honored queens.

Dolly sat on the bedside and motioned the mother to the chair she was sitting on. Instead, she dropped on her knees at Dolly's feet.

"My dear, I am so truly thankful you came this morning. Poor, dear old mother is so tired and given out, she can't possibly hold out long, I know she will enjoy these few hours."

"Oh, yes; that is the lady Mr. Allwane carried home this morning."

"Yes. She is so kind to everything, and so motherly, that she is known everywhere as Old Mother Drewery. She has had a trying time, not so bad now as it was when her children were small. Her daughter is as much loved as she. By teaching a private school, she realizes ample

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means to keep the family very comfortably. Oh, what would I do without her?" wailed the grief-stricken mother.

"There is a precious way, my dear, given to those who ask and trust."

"Yes, I know of all that, my dear; the Lord gives and promises, and how truly I believe in Him, but, dear child, when I was young and care-free, I had advice and sympathy as profound and sincere as the inexperienced is capable of giving, but now I know that I could not profit by it. I know, too, that I should be more resigned, and each day I beg to get nearer the cross that I might find my burden lighter, but for some cause, I don't make much progress."

"Have you cast your sorrows or burden on Him who is willing? Do you leave the other Gods out. You know how prone we are to apologize for the little selfish feelings hidden in the secret recesses of our hearts, and Jesus does nothing by halves," said Dolly.

The mother hung her head, as if she was making an examination.

A few moments passed; neither one spoke; finally, raising her head, she placed her hand on the child's head. He moved uneasily, saying nothing. She started, as from a reverie, saying: "It's past time for his nourishment. He is waking. You will get him to take it, won't you?"

As she raised his head, the mother walked out of the room. Dolly placed the cup to his mouth, and he eagerly drank all she thought best. Fix-

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ing him comfortable, and sitting by his bed, he soon slept, and she resumed her survey, conscious of objects provoking more skillful handling and profound thought than she imagined.

"Poor, dear thing, I know there is something gnawing ghastly wounds, sapping the very life's blood, drop by drop. Oh, Lord, grant that I may be instrumental in helping this poor, troubled heart," moaned Dolly, half aloud.

The child awoke and grew restless. Dolly's time was fully taken exerting every possible means of quieting the fevered, fretful child. The mother was constantly passing in and out, her troubled face calm and resigned. She came in, and, putting her arm around Dolly, said: "While you are still here, my dear, I will go and do my night's work. I have a few things on the outside to do. I won't be out very long, but if you should need me, call from the back door and I will hear."

She put on her bonnet, and, with a shining tin bucket on her arm, was off to the cow-pen; and Dolly had no time for much but care of the child. The time seemed short, so busy was she, when she heard a strange racket. She walked to the rear door, and saw an interesting and pleasant sight.

With her bucket of milk, Mrs. Simpkins was coming through the lot, the pigs squealing at her feet, chickens coming from every direction, the geese trotting along, biting and blowing at the pigs. Setting the bucket on a shelf and

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opening the door, she took feed and strewed it about, while the pets flew over and about her. She said a few words to them, let them eat a few grains from her hand, and mechanically reached for the bucket.

Dolly thoroughly enjoyed watching them, and would have stood much longer, but, hearing a sound coming from the front of the house, looked around, and saw Old Mother coming in.

"Well, my precious lamb, how have you got through the day, I know you are worn out. I told Nina I was uneasy for you, but you look bright and not a bit tired. How is my darling boy—better, ain't you, honey? Old mamma made you something," holding up a pretty book.

She had gathered all the bright, interesting pictures and pasted them in book-form. A bright smile playing over his face as she put it in his hand, looking up, raising his arms, she stooped, clasped them about her neck, whispering:

"I think her so sweet, but oh, I missed you so much! I love you best; don't leave me no more." His arms began to fall, he was so weak. She took them in her hands, caressing him gently, telling of some little picture in his book that he must see at once, so changing the subject that he was soon happy. While Dolly showed him the book, Old Mother busied herself with preparations for the night and helping the mother, who was hurrying to get her husband's supper ready, at a certain time, as he, having

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business to attend to, would be very angry if he had to wait. He could not leave the mill until dark. Dolly heard her say in an undertone, as she came in: "I am not fooled in that man; he is a villain."

Seeing she was nearer Dolly than she thought, and fearing she heard, Old Mother said: "My dear, there is no few goodly apples rotten at the heart. Get your hat now, and come with me, 'tis time you were on your way home. I thought George would have been back before now, but I know something has detained him."

"I am not afraid to go alone, Old Mother; I came alone."

"Yes, that I know, but it was broad daylight then, now it's growing late. George told me he would come for you is the reason I waited so late to say anything; come again to-morrow." The sympathy and love of one to the other was growing stronger and stronger.

They walked some distance up the road, mother busy talking. Hearing the sound of wheels, they looked around and saw George and Delia coming.

"Oh, yes; good-by. I enjoyed to-day. The pleasure was intended for you, but I knew you could not have enjoyed it half so much as I have. My, but we did have a glorious time, didn't we, Mr. Allwane?" as he drew the horse to a stop.

"I hope you enjoyed the time, Miss Delia."

"Enjoyed is merely a pretense of expression,"

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said Delia, assuming a happy, broad smile, and watching Dolly, as a cloud quickly passed her momentarily blanched face. Instantly regaining her composure, she said sweetly :

"I am pleased to know you are so happy, and your drive so very pleasant," glancing at George, who as yet had no chance to speak.

Old Mother, thoroughly disgusted, and visibly impatient with Delia, said: "Here, child, get into this buggy; you are tired and need rest. May God's sweet blessings rest on you for your kindness this day. I would rather have the pleasure of serving my master, as she has done, a thousand times, than go galloping over ploughed ground, or watch hands get their orders, with the best man on earth. Take her home, George. May God bless you all; goodbye."

Dolly never knew just how she got in, nor just how she sat in Delia's lap, going home. As the horse shied and jerked the buggy, she felt Delia's arm steal around her waist and exclaim: "Oh, how cold your hands are, Dolly!"

"They are always more or less cold when I am tired," making a brave effort to control herself. "You have not been very far, or have not driven hard, for this horse does not seem tired, from the way he is prancing."

"We have been only a few miles. The drive there and back is not much. I am the one that is worn out. Prince was tied in the shade, while

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Miss Delia lounged in a hammock not far distant. I was going from place to place, trying to get the hands to work right," said George, trying to get Dolly to look at him. This was the first word he had spoken since they got into the buggy.

Delia was elated. She had driven securely home the first poisonous arrow. She knew that her work was indeed difficult. She would win one way or the other. She noted with inward rage the soft explanatory tone that George used to Dolly, and she spoke again of the pleasure of the day.

Noting the change of expression in Dolly's face, she aggravatingly said: "You look so pale, and seem so nervous, I think you have taxed your dear self more than you should have, administering to those heathens; besides, you run a risk of contagion," her voice changing to a soft, persuasive tone. "You could never battle with it, dear child."

"Yes, I could; I have no fears personally, and use every means of disinfectant when I come away. Don't you fear," she said, looking around just in time to see a queer, fierce, savage smile flit over Delia's face, and looking in an opposite direction. George drew his handkerchief across his brow, as if to hide his chagrined expression.

Dolly was indeed perplexed. The drive was only a short one, and she was indeed glad, as

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they drew up at the gate. Delia jumped out before George had time to help her. Seeing this, he touched Dolly, and said:

"Sit still, Miss Dolly, and let me prove that this horse is not tired." She was so far over-balanced from her start to get out of the buggy that her foot slipped, and only for George's timely catching her and pulling her back, she would have sustained a painful and doubtless fatal injury.

Delia barely turned in time to see all, but, laughing heartily, said: "Dolly, don't you know you are not as strong as I? You should have waited for Mr. Allwane to help you. If you attempt the rôle as nurse again soon you will be so thoroughly exhausted that I will be forced to try my ability."

"Not on me, my dear Delia. I would never impose my care on any one."

"We would not ask her, eh? Miss Delia, if she should need it, these people are the best on earth. I know I voice every individual in this 'Berg' when I say, regardless of the time or place, that one needs aid, they get it freely and untiring. Don't they Ralph?" asked George.

"Yes, sir; it's sure to be de truth if Mr. George say so."

"Miss Dupree, speak to my friend, Mr. Japin. I believe you have met Miss Vining?"

"Yes, sir; but she don't ever know me. I passed you the other day and spoke, and you didn't raise your eyes, much less speak."

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"Well, I beg your pardon, Ralph, but I am not accustomed to speaking to every one I meet or happen to pass."

"Yes'um! I 'speck you is right, especially them what looks as I do," said Ralph in a rather sarcastic way.

"You look all right, Ralph. Did you want to speak to me?" said George, handing the reins to Dolly, as he got out of the buggy.

"Just a moment, if you please, sir. I won't keep him long, madam," raising his hat to Dolly, ignoring Delia's presence.

In a very short while Ralph walked down the street whistling, as was his custom.

George hurried to the aid of the girls, who were frightened out of their senses with the horse. He walked up, put his hand caressingly on the animal's head, saying, as though speaking to a child:

"Prince, you are behaving very ugly. Now, do be quiet; I am ashamed of you. Be quiet, now, while I help the lady in. Step this way, so the wheel will not be in the way."

Stamping his forefoot, arching his shapely neck, pricking up his ears, stepping aside, the slanting rays of the setting sun reflected as a mirror in his beautiful wavy mane.

"Oh, what would I give for such a sensible horse! Look, Dolly, how he obeys."

"He is grand," said Dolly, securing her hat pins.

George drove along for some time, discussing

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points of interest, when, coming to the college he had donated, and told her of the plan by which he hoped to eliminate the barrier between the poorer classes and give them a better education. As they strolled over the building, enthusiastically he could see the warm glow of interest gradually supersede the chilly shadow of suspicion and gloom that audacity and dissimulation dare pre-concoct.

Coming out, they started toward home. He said: "I want you to see my aunt, dear; she begged that I bring you the first opportunity that she could meet you aloof the prying eyes and viper tongues of 'Madame Gossip's' devoted angels. Of course you will go?"

"I—oh, certainly," looking at her dress, as if to remark, "if she wishes."

"You are just like I want you, darling. She will love you the more," said he.

Mother Betty could just hobble a step or two, and was sitting on the broad, vine-clad veranda, in a large, old-time rocker, busy knitting. She could not do much now, so she knit, sold the socks, and made her mission money. Seeing them coming up the walk, she dropped her knitting, clapped her hands, and said:

"Bless my life, honey, I am so glad to see you. Come right to me, my child."

Dolly ran up the step, and into the outstretched arms. She dropped on her knees by the chair, and sobbed out her wounded feelings of an hour or so ago.

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George came up the steps, hat in hand, his noble face shining with the beauty and solemnity of this picture, and from the depths of his sensitive, eloquent soul rose a grateful, "Thank God," as his aunt looked at him through her tear-filled eyes.

"She is ours, ain't she, George? Yes, you are, honey, my own sweet little child. Here, George, pull that seat near me, and call Hannah; you Hannah. Sit down close to me, dear; there, George, sit there beside her, that I may look at both of you at once."

As they were comfortably seated, Hannah came with a tray laden with the most delicious preserves, hot rolls, fresh from the oven, golden Jersey butter, honey, amber-hued, hot tea, and pure, fresh cream.

"Set a larger table, Hannah; set it right here. There, now, draw your seat nearer, George; we haven't much, but we will have a love feast."

She helped them, and kept insisting until Dolly begged her that she could "not possibly eat another mouthful."

"Get my wheel-chair, George, dear, and you may push me along while we show this precious child what a pleasant home we have. I hope you will soon reign queen in it."

"Oh, Mother Betty, you are the sweetest, best soul in this world," as she stooped and kissed the wrinkled lips as ruby as in youth. "I sincerely pray that I may be worthy of such a haven as I am impressed exists here."

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He brought the chair, and placed her in it. She took Dolly's hand, while George slowly pushed the chair from place to place over the well-laid grounds.

"Now to my little corner," looking at him with a merry twinkle in her eye, around the curved walk to a clump of myrtle, near which stood an immense fig tree.

"I wonder where my babies are," said Mother Betty, calling to the pets.

The chair was pushed against the fence, when they all looked in the little pen; instantly the air was filled with a squeaking, barking noise, and she was covered with a lot of curious, streaked animals. As two run up Dolly's arm, she threw up her hands and screamed, brushed them off and started to run.

Mother Betty and George laughed heartily at her.

George reached her arm and held it.

"Mercy, what is it?" she cried. Seeing her fear again, they laughed at her. He took one of the animals, with beautiful brown stripes down his back in his hand, and said:

"Come here, and see how pretty they are, and perfectly harmless; see how soft," rubbing his hand down its back. "They are familiarly known here as ground hogs; others call them prairie dogs."

Dolly came close, pretending bravery, as she admired them. Her heart beat so fast she felt as though she would choke.

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George noticed her; quickly putting the pet down, he drew her fondly near him, saying: "Come, aunty, we have frightened this child almost to death." Placing his strong arm about her waist, he pushed the chair with the other. She put one hand on the chair, as if to help. The three went to the house.

Dolly begged that "She must go, as 'twas growing late, and her friends would think her indeed rude."

Mother Betty consented, exacting a promise that she would not fail the following day to spend an hour or two with her. With a kiss and "God bless you, my precious Dolly," she ran down the steps and joined George, who was waiting for her at the gate. They were soon home. George kissed her good-night at the gate and waved to Delia, who was standing in the door, showing her displeasure very plainly. She returned his greeting as pleasantly as possible under the circumstances.

Meeting Dolly at the door, she remarked: "Aren't you aware that young ladies are considered indecent who go roaming around at this time of night unaccompanied, whether engaged or not."

Dolly, seeing the anger of her friend, her drawn, distorted features and eyes, awed and perplexed Dolly's affectionate soul sorely. Filled with vague apprehension, momentarily arising from her outburst of anger, at the same time her innocence of any wrong, armed her, and she

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calmly looked up in Delia's face, and sweetly, but emphatically, said:

"That is not my Delia. This girl is surely possessed. I will explain to Mrs. Vining my absence and delay in not returning earlier. She will hear me," and, turning abruptly around, went directly to find her hostess, explaining her visit and how she came to go, never mentioning Delia's behavior. Excusing herself from supper, she went to her room, closing the door behind her, removing her hat and collar, bathed her burning, aching eyes, pulled a rocker near the table, and sat down to think, to calm, if possible, her sickened, clouded brain, and, while leaning her head on the table, she heard a tap on her door. Ere she could speak, Delia came in, her face all smiles. Coming up to Dolly, she sat on her lap and took her face in her hands and raised it, saying with all the pathos her perverted, erring nature could assume: "You will forgive any seeming harshness to my darling a while ago, won't you, dearie? I won't give you this, until you kiss me and say yes."

"Delia, I truly forgive you," seeing the letter she held in the hand she had just taken from her face, being doubly anxious to hear from her mother, said: "When I tell you that your insinuating effrontery does not affect me in the slightest, your personal magnanimity is rather depreciative to render your judgment or conclusions just or fair, to objects, 'tis painful, indeed, to me, my dear, to realize such morbid traits."

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Delia, forced the second time to see her loathsome, degraded actions reflected in the mirror of the shining soul of the one she loved, just recently above all others, but now hated with all her heart, to see it charred and blackened, was her secret desire. As she rose with a light, silvery laugh, that sent a chill through Dolly's being, said: "I hand this as a flag of truce; do you accept?" reaching her hand.

"Yes, dearie. Sit here, and let me tell you what a happy, pleasant hour I spent at my future home. Oh, Delia, darling!" said Dolly, pulling her down to a chair beside her, continued: "I know you had a pleasant time, dearie; you will have me almost jealous of your happiness, if you continue telling me so much."

"Well, dearie girl, you will have something to dream over, to-night, so go to bed now, I know you are dead tired. You had enough to kill you in your brave start this morning."

Dolly looked up quickly, her inquisitive, agitated expression causing Delia to hurry on by way of explanation.

"Don't you realize what a serious risk you are facing, child, in placing your frail self in the clutches of that disease, let it be what it may?"

"But you can't mean, Delia, that because the child is one of the unfortunate sick, they must be isolated. If they ever need any care or help in this world, now is the time, for 'tis appalling, heartrending, to see that poor, little emaciated,

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pain-racked darling. 'Tis sweet and consoling to see how calmly and patiently he bears his suffering, and oh! that poor mother—pale, thin, with the footprints of time plainly traced on her prematurely aged face. It is a pleasure to me to know that I was of service to those in distress."

"Oh, my! You have your sympathies aroused. They can't throw their whining coil of sorrow around this chicken, and by their premeditated tale of woe get me to expose myself among those heathens. You wait a little while, my lady, and for your exposure they will build a fire of ingratitude that will nearly devour you; that your eyebrows will be singed for every dose of physic you have poked down their barbarous throats. Their wagging, prevaricating tongues will send forth ten-fold arrows, as poisonous as an adder, and as sharp as a two-edged sword, for every good deed you have done."

"Hush, Delia! You belittle yourself to me. I can't, and will not believe all this tirade about people that have the appearance of honor and integrity so plain in their countenances. You certainly have looked through the wrong glass, or perhaps you only know the dark side of a few. We see things like we want to see them. I hate so much to hear you speak so disrespectful of a people that you could not, or rather your father could not, possibly succeed without. I feel sure it would be more pleasant for him, if you were differently inclined, especially if they should

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ever know your existing opinion and feelings toward them."

"You are crazy, child. Father looks after his affairs, and I mine; my doings have no more bearing on his business world than yours does. For pity's sake, don't be silly, Dolly. You have attempted my education on certain branches of which I consider myself thoroughly competent. Do keep your counsels for more adequate soil."

"Thank you, my dear, but active, fertile soil receives, digests and eliminates. However, you evidently have digested thoroughly that which is most adapted to your particular soil; my father says that apples will not grow to perfect fruit in every soil. This is not preparing for our trip to-morrow," said Dolly laughingly.

Delia, bidding her an affectionate "good night," and, as the door closed between them, she clinched her teeth, and relieved her imaginary hatred, murmuring to herself a lot of revenge, that would have made her blush for shame could she had heard it.

After a time her brain grew tired, and her being exhausted, she dozed into a troubled sleep.

CHAPTER IX.

Very early next morning every one was busy with their particular duty. There was to be a big picnic and barbecue, with several noted men

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to address the people, with dinner on the grounds. Everybody in the whole county was wild with enthusiasm.

"We will hear both sides of the question at the same time," said several of the voters from remote parts, who had been thoroughly electioneered by the aspirants of both sides. This was a joint discussion and a decisive point in the coming election of county officers.

The question of a branch court at Allwanesville had for many seasons been a defeated effort, only to bob up more determined, and was to be anxiously fought out at the next session. The county seat was in the extreme edge of the county of W——, and for the citizens of the middle and lower edge it was very unjust, and all hoped to have some effectual work done to have it changed.

The leaders of the Allwanesville section were seriously debating the choice of their man. Realizing the importance of their cause, and the necessary strength and influential ability of their choice, who combined them with every atom of their force to succeed. If they failed this time, it would be several years before they could make another effort.

Realizing this, the question, "we will," and "you shall not," was heated indeed.

The sun rose in all his gorgeous splendor, the refreshing rain of a few days ago had cooled the heated breast of Mother Earth, and a soft, light breeze fanned the branches and

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waved the wild blossoms that covered the forest as a carpet, soothing in its effect as a lullaby.

Dolly, as usual, was up early, and, with her hat in her hand, swinging around by one of the streamers, was outdoors, drinking in the beauties of Nature, as she hurried on to see the little sufferer who had so fully won her sympathy.

Opening the gate, she ran straight into his room, and, seeing, as she entered the door, that he was awake and recognized her.

"Oh, how sweet my little darling looks this morning! I know you will soon be strong and well again," said Dolly, kissing his hand and stroking his forehead and hair fondly. "I can't stay long this time, dear. What do you want me to do for you?"

"Sing me one little song and tell me just one story."

"All right; which song do you want?" Telling her, she sat on the side of his bed, and sang softly and sweetly. The little hand she held, held hers more closely, and the sad, weak eyes sought hers repeatedly, filling with tears. Seeing the effect of the song, she began telling him a tale so amusing that his tears were turned to smiles, and, as his mother came in, he raised his arms, trying to put them around Dolly.

Seeing his effort, she leaned toward him, when he clasped them around her neck, and she raised him to her lap. He looked at his mother, saying:

"She is not going to stay long with me,

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mamma. Oh, I hate to have her leave me, I love her so; don't I?" dropping his head on her breast.

"Lay him down quickly, dear. He is too weak to be raised."

Dolly, feeling the limp little form quivering, quickly put him on the bed, frightened almost to death. She looked appealingly at the mother, who said reassuringly:

"It's only a faint. Rub his hand and arm with this, while I bring some cool water and bathe his face."

Dolly rubbed his limbs vigorously, and pleading, coaxing, kissing him, praying for him to look at her. "Oh, my darling, look at your loving Dolly. Oh! please look at me, open your eyes, my precious, oh, do, do!" she wailed, tears streaming down her pale, agitated face.

The sad mother realized how fearfully frightened Dolly was, and begged her to be quiet, saying that this happened frequently, due to his extreme weakness; that he would be himself as soon as the restorative had effect."

"Thank God!" said Dolly. "Oh! I am to blame for this; I should not have raised him. There, little angel, look at me; you are better, aren't you, dearest?"

"I think he is all right now, when he drinks this for mother." Placing the spoon to his lips, he drank it. "He is very much in love with you, Miss Dolly. His papa had to beg him to hush last night; he enjoyed the stories so very much

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that I fear that is one cause of his weakness this morning," said the mother; "in fact, we all are in love with you. Old Mother Drewery spoke of you last night, and how sweet of you to spend your time in coming to see us or the sick boy. When others have known of his long sickness and how needy we are of help with him, and I believe Old Mother says some people have asked her once about him, but they have never even been past the gate. I know, Miss Dolly, that I am poor and a laborer's wife, but I am as honorable as any one who ever walked. If my family knew my circumstances, they would be grieved and mortified to death. Oh, I would not have my dear old mother know it for all the world," said Mrs. Simpkins, covering her face with her hands and sobbing piteously.

"Don't! Oh! don't grieve so, my dear," said Dolly, putting her arms around her and drawing her face to hers. "There are brighter days for you. God is good, and never forsakes His children. If there is anything you want, or if you are grieved over anything, my dear, you may trust me fully, implicitly."

"Oh, you can't do me any good, child; my sore is too old to be cured. It has been bleeding many, many years. If I could only see my mother and dear old father and hear them say, 'Susie, come home, we forgive you,' I could bear my troubles so much better. When I was married my father would not let me be married at home. When I began to receive attention from

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Joe, my husband, he did not approve of it, but did not say much, but when I told him that I was to be married soon, he begged me, plead with me, not to, telling me that my life would be hard and gloomy. He did not like Joe, promising many advantages and handsome presents to me if I would not, but I would not listen to him, thinking him unjust, because he could not find any fault other than the one that he didn't want me to marry, saying positively that I should not stay at home, nor could I ever come to it again if I did.

"Joe was esteemed by everybody very highly. He held a responsible position, being cashier of the strongest bank in town, my father being president. I left home for a walk one afternoon, and we went to the parsonage and were married. I believed father would forgive me, so I wrote a little note and sent it home to mother and father, thinking I would get an answer telling me to come home, as he had only two girls—but not so. He never wrote a word and forbade mother ever to do so. He sent me word to never look into his face again, and never call him by the name of father; that I was no more his, and banished me forever. Oh, my God, my God!" she wailed and groaned in her agony.

Dolly tried in vain to soothe her, and weeping with her. The troubled heart continued:

"When this word came, I tried to receive it on the surface, saying to myself: 'I need not

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care so much, didn't he suit himself, in his marriage, and haven't I my own love, noble, handsome and young,' but deep in my heart there has been a cutting, tearing pain ever since. I realized what he meant," sobbing convulsively at every few words. "I know you think me weak, but I have carried this burden until it's killing me. At first I was as happy as my banishment would let me be, but in a few months trouble came to the bank. A very great financial loss was had by the bank, and Joe was forced out of employment. A year passed, and my first baby came—a beautiful darling. I have given up three, one after the other. Alone, my friends, when misfortune came, did not know me, and I could not ask them to. Oh! Lord! I could not accept the friendship of the people I was with. No one knew but myself, and my God, what torture I have borne. My Joe, oh, my darling Joe, my child! There is no trouble in the world half so hard to bear as to see your idol, your very life, slip, slip, slowly but surely, away from you." Raising her pale, drawn face and wild, frantic, sorrowing eyes to Dolly's she continued:

"Do you wonder that these locks are prematurely white and this face aged with the lines of care? I could have borne it all better, if my precious Joe had held out, but his trouble was drowned with drink. Soon he grew worse. I begged and pleaded with him. He would make me promises, to be broken, and I persuaded him to bring me away—anywhere. I wanted to get

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away from his associates, hoping he would be himself again, so an old friend of his secured this place for him."

"You are happier here, aren't you, my precious, suffering angel?" said Dolly.

"He is improving, and, of course, I feel better over that. I have no hopes now in life. I live because I can't die, but I pray so hard that when my God snaps the tender chord that holds the fleeting life of my only earthly comfort, that when I close his precious eyes forever, to take me instantly. Oh! Father, let me go, too. How sweet it would be. Pray for this last plea of mine, my only friend. Oh! ask God to grant this one request as you never prayed before. Now, do you hate me? I feel contemptible for having burdened you with my troubles."

"No, no, no! Oh, I love you, I love you, my sweet, trusting friend, and I promise I will guard your confidences, and I will help you in every possible way, but you must not feel so despondent. My earnest prayer will be that Jesus send sunshine into your sad life," said Dolly.

"There, my dear boy is waking," exclaimed Mrs. Simpkins.

"I must run back home now," said Dolly. "I slipped away, and came to see you before we started for the picnic. I tried to plead a headache, so that I might spend a portion of the day with you, but they would not hear of it. I will come again, just as soon as we get back."

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Going to the bed and saying a few words to the child, she took her hat in her hand and hurried home. Entering the gate, she spied Delia, walking the floor of the porch. Guessing the cause of her agitation, Dolly ran up the steps laughing.

"Are you mad, dear? Have I caused any delay in breakfast? I haven't been gone long."

"I'm not mad, and breakfast is only just ready, but I do think you should have waked me, that I could have gone with you. Are you ready? I hear the bell."

"In just a moment, sweetie dear, I will join you at the door."

Dolly's exciting, expressive sparkle in her beautiful eyes told volumes, and how she so effectually locked in her heart the confidence and sorrow of her needy friend, as to defy detection.

Gathering Delia playfully around the waist, they entered the breakfast room.

"Ah, the spirit of the day has already seized you two, I am glad to note; have this plate," said Mr. Vining.

"Oh, how delicious this looks, and I am so hungry. My! if I ask for a second piece, may I have it, Father Vining?" said Dolly.

"What's all this glee over? I'll bet you cry before night," said Delia.

"Oh, no! Why must she cry, dear? She feels good. The fresh air, bright warm sun-

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shine, together with the singing birds and long walk, made the world lovely and all therein," said the mother.

"Oh, pshaw! I knew mother would have some illusion to the Bible," said Delia impatiently.

"It's the truth, sweetheart," replied Dolly. "It does make you feel better; sends the 'blues' a-kiting, churns up your clabbered brain, and brings the butter of love and kindness, oiling your slothful body to work in your Master's vineyard."

"Well, I am impressed from convicting evidence that you need to be doing something," said Delia. "The cap doesn't fit me, and it does not fit Dolly, does it, dear?"

"I suppose it does. I fear I haven't done anything for my Lord, dear Mrs. Vining. But, my future will endeavor to atone for the past."

"Well, say, girls, how many of these hearts are you going to break to-day? You will have a fine opportunity, Dolly. George is the host of the occasion, and will, of course, be everywhere. He is a fine fellow, liked by everybody. And, it's strongly rumored that he will be our next representative," said Mr. Vining, growing enthused. "You may congratulate your good fairy, for bringing him your way, Dolly," said he, pushing his chair aside, and resting his arm on the table. "Yes, he's the pick of this county, or any other, as for that. What's the matter, daughter? That's the second time you have dropped your spoon," said the father, little

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dreaming of the pains, arrow-like, he was sending to the heart of his idol.

"There's nothing the matter with me. It does seem that I can't hold anything. We will be late if we don't hurry."

Dolly rose and took her hand as if to help her, saying: "Never mind; I did not eat so much as that, did I, Mrs. Vining?"

"Certainly not; I think you were too busy talking, and did not finish. Why, child, I can't miss anything from your plate. You will be hungry before dinner—the joke is on the others."

"Ah! yes; goody, goody," crooking her finger at Delia, "I am not the pig you think I am."

"Yes, you are! Come, let's hurry. We haven't much time. It's a long ways down there, and Mr. Allwane will not like for us to keep him waiting."

"Oh, that's true, dear."

Both girls went to their rooms, much absorbed in their respective thoughts and plans. One was living only for her personal, depraved self, racking her brain incessantly, endeavoring to concoct some plan whereby she could disable or wreck every human craft that innocently and unaware happened to navigate near her treacherous shoals.

The other was a willing sacrifice on the altar of duty, whose smiling face and beckoning hand urged her on, ever alert, and (notwithstanding her inexperience) willing to give a word of cheer and a helping hand to all with the shadow

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of sorrow and adversities hovering over them. 'Tis an interesting Providence that spins the threads of friendship, nay, life companions, weaving it closely, verily uniting objects of such widely opposite character, that the fascinating alluring magnetism of the vindictive, tyrannical, indifferent character finds ready response in the highly sensitive demonstration. Magnificently true, and conscientiously self-sacrificing, forgiving in the extreme, such is the case with these friends. As Delia slammed the door, her jealous, angry heart found relief in a torrent of tears and bitter mutterings. She hated the connection of George's name with Dolly's, and, I fear, scolded her father for his kindly spoken congratulatory conversation at the table.

But the thought of being with him soon, was physic to her sickened spirits. With renewed courage, she set to work to make her appearance as charming and captivating as her genius and the aid of the house girl (who acted as her maid) could accomplish. She succeeded, and so thoroughly satisfied was she that her vanity, at the reception of several flattering compliments later in the day, made her very happy.

Entering her room, Dolly closed the door and dropped on her knees at her bedside, and fervently petitioned her "blessed Lord to send the comforting angel to cheer the sad, broken and lonely heart of the stricken home. Provide, oh Lord, a means of reconciliation between the grieved parents and repentant child." Her prayer

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was long and pathetically earnest. Rising, she glanced at the tiny gilt clock on her dresser, and found she had only a few minutes to make her toilet. She wore a plain, neat, simple dress, adorned only with a sash and a knot at her throat, with a frill of lace at hands and neck. Her white dress and blue ribbons were in as great a contrast as was her friend's, and, as they walked down the broad steps, so it was with their faces.

"By Heavens, George, if I were in your place to-day, I would feel the most fortunate of honored men," said Mr. Vining, admiring the two girls, as they went to the carryall.

"They are beautiful, aren't they? Now, girls, do be good. Don't sink the arrows beyond healing depths." All laughed heartily as he seated them comfortably.

"Look here, gentlemen, we are inevitably aware of your superior gifts, and the whole family of us are so bloated and filled with flattery that were it not for the impenetrable walls of common sense and sound judgment, our frail bodies would surely crush under the load of our protecting strength (man), who finds imaginary pleasure in heaping on us a great amount of flattery."

"Dolly Dupree, aren't you ashamed of yourself, dealing in such absurd irony," said Delia; "knowing Mr. Allwane and my father as you do, and flinging your doubt in their faces as you do. You ought to bend your knee in grati-

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tude for such commendable assertions." Her displeasure was plainly visible.

"Indeed, it's your toes that are tramped on, is it? The hurt cat meows," said Dolly, joining the others laughing.

"Mr. Allwane, I was impressed that you would be in a rush. So respectful of your pleasure were we, that we scarcely ate our breakfast and exhausted our remaining strength in making the few other preparations necessary for the day. I know poor Nina's eyes are out and her neck dislocated, watching and trying to see us coming," said Dolly.

"Is everything ready?"

"Yes, long ago. Get farther over, Nina. You must consider me a midget."

"Allow me to make a suggestion: Let Dolly and I sit here," said Nina, seeing Delia's eager contrivance. "You and Mr. Allwane over there. Have you room enough now?"

"Yes, plenty, thank you, dear."

"Do you think your father and mother will overtake us?"

"No, I don't think so; father will have so many different orders to give. I tell mother he must undoubtedly say good-by to each one. If he's only to be away one day and Mr. Sapp being off, too. Ah! sure enough. He will be there. I believe they did manage it, after much planning. They finally found a means of escape by substituting the form of your patient's father, Mr. Simpkins. I know he is happy over his

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good fortune. If to go, agitates the pleasure, admiration and rest, as the disappointment filled him with sorrow and despondence, he will be by far the happiest man on the grounds," replied Delia, hidden securely in the remote recesses of her heart the secret of his anxiety to get off. "Suppose we have him join us? There is always room for one more."

"Oh, that would be delightful, by all means!" said Dolly joyfully clapping her hands. "We can make room here."

"Nina will be surprised," said Delia, "but we are all happy to have him. Sure, we are sure of finding him just at this time," looking in the direction of the office. "We will get Miss Nina, and, perchance, we will stumble across his whereabouts. You ladies keep your eyes in every direction as we go."

"Where is Nina?" asked Dolly of Old Mother, as she came through the gate, on her way to see the sick. She stopped, looked at them, and admiringly exclaimed:

"You children do justice to the world you represent—the bright, smiling sunshine of the morning of life—supremely care-free and happy. Ah, I love to look at you. Yes, Nina has been waiting. Just a few moments ago Mr. Sapp came. Here they are, now."

"Come on, both of you; we have a special seat for you, Mr. Sapp. We have been trying to locate your place of hiding for the last half hour. To our hasty rescue we find our kind

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angel has aimed, and no clandestine Providence has sent our prodigal astray."

They were soon all pleasantly and agreeably arranged. On they went. Their merriment and happiness was measured by the sound of merry laughter, mingled with vieing, chattering voices. Truly the king of happiness, in his distribution of unconquerable vanity, gilded flattery, was content as he inclined a respectful ear.

The long, winding road was bordered on either side with a mass of drooping green. They were so thoroughly enthused in personal interest and admiration that before they were aware, they were in the midst of a multitude of very active living human beings. The occasion presented itself to Nina's immediate untutored imagination as the grandest she had even seen as she gazed over this vast throng. As she looked down at her feet, to see from whence came the pitiful cry of a little tot, led by a mother, with an infant in her arms, her face pale and worn, a weary look in her searching eyes, the inexperience of almost childhood yet lingering on her prematured face. Holding her child by one hand, occasionally jerking its hand and commanding it to hush, said she was trying to find its father. Delia had been watching her for some time, and, laughing, she touched Nina, and motioned her to look, just as Dolly resolutely walked to the tired little mother and asked her "if she could assist her in any way?"

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Looking quickly in her face, the mother saw the intentional sympathy and kindness reflected from a noble, pure heart, that melted the barrier that is harbored invariably in the hearts of the ignorant, obscure people termed the poor class.

"I am looking for my husband. My little boy is crying for water, and I can't get through the crowd to get it."

"If you will stay here where I may find you, I will get the water for you."

"I shore will be mighty thankful to you, good lady."

Delia, with displeasure plainly stamped in her face, caught her by the arm, and said: "In the name of common decency, what will you do next? Evidently, Dolly, you are crazy. I hope you have more respect for yourself than to mix with these low-bred heathens."

"If you are pleased to term my actions imprudent, I fail to see it as you do. Here, take this, my little man, and bring me some cool, fresh water, as quick as you can." The boy looked in his hand, saw the bright coin, and with a broad smile, darted through the dense mass.

Dolly sent a silent petition, begging for strength to do what her heart and hands found to do, if only to furnish a drink of cold water.

Soon the bright, smiling face of the lad returned, and in his hand he held a vessel of sparkling fresh water.

"Here 'tis, lady; this here gourd was all I

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could find to fetch hit in, but it's nice and clean, cause my ma brung hit from home."

"Certainly, my boy, I know it is perfectly clean. I am going to prove to you that I believe you," and, raising the gourd to her lips, drank a swallow, more to relieve the inappreciative impression, evidently gathered from her expression than from thirst.

The purity and cleanliness of contents or receptacle was foreign to the mother and thirsty babe. Eagerly the little lips parted as the familiar gourd was held by the thankful mother's hand. As the anxious, fatigued expression gave place to a peaceful content on the mother's face, and a sigh of satisfied plenty escaped the tiny lips, Dolly was indeed fully recompensed for the humiliation her action subjected her to from her imaginary friend. The look of gratitude that shone from this thankful child-mother's eyes, the sincere "thank you," was indelibly stamped in Dolly's memory.

Delia, looking at her, as she took Mr. Allwane's arm, and hearing her say: "She is busy and won't miss us ere we are back; let us take a short walk around the grove."

Her confidence unshaken, Dolly was happy, feasting her mind and soul on the rare sight so bountifully spread before her, and innocent of the designing hand that led her friends away, she stood so absorbed that the time slipped by unaware. They failed to come. Seeing Mr. and Mrs. Vining, she went to them.

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"Hey, lost your crowd already?"

"Or they lost me," said Dolly.

Mr. Allwane hurried back to where they left Dolly, Delia feigning interest, not to notice the separation. She reluctantly followed Allwane back, and gloried in the success of her plan, and when Dolly was nowhere to be seen, was so elated with her victory that she cunningly endeavored to apply her precious flattery, and twice when her dissimulating chanting was most gratifying to her, she found him searching the crowd with a restless, abstracted expression that wounded and piqued her.

Looking with keen interest over the mass of people, she saw far to the side, seated comfortably in the shade of a giant oak, in commanding distance of the speakers' stand, her father, mother and the three of whom she was pretending anxiously to find.

"Suppose we try this way, Mr. Allwane? It's like looking for a needle in a haystack."

"But the search is worthy the exertion," said he.

"Is this Mr. Allwane?" Turning around, he saw, with hand extended, a very noted man from a distance. Grasping the offered hand, he replied: "I am the man," eyeing him closely; "if my memory is not treacherous, I believe we are not strangers."

"I believe I had the pleasure of meeting the Honorable William Blankley in the offices of the

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Mill Company, I being a ragged boy at the time. Of course, you do not remember."

"Ah, sir, the peculiar circumstances, stamped indelibly on my memory, was an incident that occurred, and I recognize the same penetrating eyes, the determined, frank expression in the man that in the boy was striking. There is nothing more gratifying to a man of my age than to grasp the hand of a deserving, noble, aspiring young man, ready to march at the call of duty, bravely staring the enemy in the face, with enough commanding force to calmly but surely come out victorious, and——"

"But, my dear sir, this is, or would be, indeed, gratifying in the extreme, were your encouraging words applicable; evidently you are laboring under the wrong impression and I am the recipient of some other man's glory," said George. "If you will be more accurate and thorough of your meritorious client's claim, I will anxiously lay the hard-earned robes at his feet, and, too, extend the glad hand on his doubtless rugged road to glory."

The gentleman looked keenly at him, and then, as if he was sure: "You, sir, can doubtless realize whether or not the way was rugged; I do know, however, that you are the man in question," slapping him on the shoulder. "I am pleased to note that you are so securely anchored here that the treacherous winds of flattery and deception do not penetrate."

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"Miss Vining, speak to my friend, Colonel Blankley."

After the few words of greeting were exchanged, they started toward the stand. Mr. Sapp came to them and said:

"At last the lost is found. Our party in the shade of that big oak, after a tiring, fruitless search for you, have enjoyed the instructive entertaining conversation of the two orators of the day."

"I have tramped Miss Vining through and around the crowd until we are familiar objects of criticism for the whole audience," he said, finally concluding: "You were all filled with picnic lore, and left us to the mercies of strangers," as they walked up and joined the party.

"Just stop a moment, now, and think right seriously. Do you for a moment think we can give credence to your fairy tale?" said Dolly joking.

"You are the one to think," said Mr. Allwane. "Are you aware of the fact, my dear, that there is far more pleasure for me in the shade of this kindly old oak, than roaming through this uninteresting gathering, straining my eyes until they stand on 'stems' trying to get a glimpse of you?" His low tones were music to her burdened heart. Try as she would, she could not eliminate the pale, stricken face, the sorrowing eyes with tears streaming, the agonizing, heart-rending plea: "Joe! my own precious Joe, oh!

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my darling husband," and, with the next breath, the touching plea for the sight of an angry, unforgiving father. The smiling face and unrestrained conversation were no signboard of her carefully guarded feelings. In looking over this throng, she looked at George, who sat on the carpet of leaves beside her chair.

"This is an impressive scene to me. I wish I could express my——"

"Ah, your opinion?"

"That is just what I have for the past few moments expected to hear."

"But, be extremely quiet and cautious, my dear, dear girl; tell me the first impression, when you strolled through and had a partial glimpse of this audience."

"Oh, George, if I could only—oh, if I could only devise a means whereby they might have a ray of light to penetrate the enormously dense walls of their miniature world, I would gladly offer my frail, unworthy self a willing sacrifice." Her earnest, sympathetic expression showed plainly the pathetic purity of her inspiration.

"My own little angel—what a great blessing you will be to this community—willing hands as these." Rising, he took her hand, and they walked along leisurely. "Will in their own sweet way gladden the heart and shower many blessings along the dark and gloomy pathway of life."

"I can see and appreciate your generous noble aim in erecting the academy, inspiring in

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its alleviating advantages, offering the glad encouraging hand to all with a spark of ambition. Oh, George, dear, the progress and improvement of your neighbors fill me with worshipful love and pride," said Dolly; "and as you asked me a moment ago my first impression, it is portrayed in the monument that will herald, with loudest praise, your grand melodies of appreciation."

"I fully agree with you, that that is the most effectual means of improvement, direct or indirect. We must go to our seats now, dearest. I see Hon. Blankley beckoning to me. His address, no doubt, will deal particularly with the subject we have been discussing."

"It will truly be a feast. I am very anxious to hear him. Do you think we can hear from here?" asked Dolly, as they joined the others.

"You must be deaf, and judge us accordingly. I am very much pleased with this place," blurted Delia. The sight of Dolly's pleasant smiles and rippling, silver laugh tormented her almost to distraction with the sound of his "dear Dolly," she heard as they walked away. "The idea," she thought to herself, "of her being in my way, a little, petted baby, who knows nothing but pomp and flattery. A nice wife she will be. My God, I will not sit and allow it to go much further."

The time for the first address was only a few minutes away. The crowd began to draw near the stand, and such and such comments could

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be heard from the men, as they would leave the squad: "You are on the right road, now boys," or, "He is our man." "He will come as near doing what he tells you as any man can possibly do," "again bring him out." "We want to hear from him to-day."

George had every reason to know that it was he whom they had reference to, and, while he felt honored and appreciated the esteem his people undoubtedly placed in him, he had made no preparation, and keenly felt his own inability, especially when in contact with men of wide experience and eminent knowledge of vital subjects.

They were heartily enjoying the jokes and witty remarks of the gentlemen, when the committee of entertainment came up, after a pointed discussion of the programme, and they turned to George, who was intensely interested in a subject of grave importance, still feigning ignorance of their presence. Seeing the situation readily, the whole party laughed heartily. George was instantly transformed into a calm, earnest, expressive man. He sprang up, and with the bearing and eloquence of experience, listened to the demands of his people. The first address was a persuasive plea for the adherence to the spirit of improvement that opportunity arms with willing hands, anxious and abundantly supplied in their very midst. Waiting impatiently to crown their every effort that nowhere could there be found a more favored sec-

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tion, abounding liberally of God's precious blessings. People sat with bated breath, so intensely interested. This was an awakening. A finger was pointed directly at their advantages. A bright light was thrown on the blessings right under their very feet, that they begrudgingly admired of their neighbors. When exhausted, the speaker closed. Voices, handkerchiefs, hats and umbrellas, with loud applause, went high. Many made firm resolutions to break the bands of indolence, throw off the curb of narrowed selfishness, and wake up to the glowing opportunities so ruthlessly trampled on.

When the chorus of applause somewhat abated, dinner was announced.

Mr. Allwane was standing nearby with the two guests of honor, waiting for Hannah to arrange his immediate table, while Nina with Dolly to superintend, were getting ready, when Delia came hurriedly up, saying:

"Ah, Mr. Allwane, I should have been earlier, but mother simply will not serve her dinner if I don't superintend it. These two ladies were kind enough to assist. Ah! I'll declare! I should be truly sorry for your embarrassment if she was your dependence to arrange," said Delia cuttingly to Dolly.

"I see," said one of the gentlemen, "that we would suffer were it not for your efficient service."

Dolly, quick as thought, regained her composure, and deliberately turned away. Smilingly

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she remarked: "I am accustomed to trusty servants."

Delia did not heed noticeably, but her crimson face was observed by all, as she grew more interested in her instructions to Hannah. The old negro was so upset she did exactly as Delia desired, waited for instructions, muttering the while "'bout folks mindin' dey own 'fairs."

Delia asked: "What is it, Mam' Hannah? Are you so tired?" as kindly as though from her heart.

"No, mum; I ain't tired. I didn't say hit, neither."

"Hand me the cake over there, and I will slice it while you get the coffee. Mr. Allwane, we are ready."

"Thank you, very much, Miss Delia," he replied, looking down the long line of tables, fairly groaning under their load of delicious, tempting food. "I believe all ready."

It was an honored custom, handed down for generations at a gathering where food was served, to have some worthy man to return thanks. The signal for respectful silence was given, with the request that there was plenty for each and every one present, and please not to act greedy, and especially requested the men to all get on the outside and the women and children on the opposite side, thereby avoiding the trampling on the little children's feet.

Brother Jones mounted a stump near the center of the circle, and reverently offered a thank-

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ful prayer. A more precise or entertaining description could not more intelligently be portrayed, than did Hannah, when quizzed by Aunt Betty as to whether there was plenty of dinner, and did the people seem to enjoy the day:

"De Lawd bless us, yes'um, misses; I never seed people eat so frightening since I been bo'n in dis worl', an Ise an ole nigger; yes'um, dey show did, and 'fo' God, missus, hit would 'a' made yo' ole heart shout halleluga to 'a' seed how dem fokes done gone crazy over Mass' George. Hit made my ole eyes run over, and de mo' I wipe and blink to keep fum being a-baby like, de mo' dey wo'd run over ag'in. W'en dey all don' spoke an' talked and pawed de air, and done woked dey se'f plumb out of bref, some mens went to whar Mass' George and his lady love was a-talkin' in de shade of a big oak tree, dey des says a few words kinder low, an' I wish you blessed ole eyes could 'a' seen how prow'd dem folks was, as he slowly-like walks up on de stand. De Lawd bless us, missus. W'en I looks back an' sees dat boy a-workin' da' an' nite, and how dem fine eyes o' his look so sad and sorrowin', and how calm an angel like he meets ever'body, and den see him in his manhood, so brite an' manly an' jes' stood up dar fo' all dem peoples, jes' like a jedge, and, fo' de Lawd, missus, I thot dey would split dey throtes, I never herd sich I no dem udder mens felt kinder sneakish, 'cause dey hallalugas over Mass' George de mose I heard Mass' George

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tell his sweetness dat he don't like such dat, but he ain't no bettern udder mens, an' she jes' look so happy like dat I wantin' ter hug 'er 'cause she look like she loves Mass' George so. But, you tak' care, missus, dat wile cat uf a gal whut glants her sprussy se'f 'roun' Mass' George, she is a snake in de grass. Shore as you bo'n, honey, dat 'oman ain't atter no good. You hea', she made me so anger at her at de spreadin' uv de dinner, just cumed er busin' herse'f des fur de wurl like Hannah ain't got a thim-mulful uv fixin sense, cume a-bossin' 'roun' us; Miss Dolly an' Miss Nina and dey jes' stan' back and ses nothin' to hur 'sept a wurd and start to talkin' wid dem big mens whut spoke. De Lawd o' mercy on us, Ise a colored 'oman, it's true. But I felt like tellin' hur to mind hur own bus'-ness, sho I did, missus," said Mammy Hannah, as she pushed up her sleeve, and shook her fist in anger.

"You must learn, Hannah, to control your feelings. I hope you acted so that every one knew you were an obedient and efficient servant?"

"You need'n let you' min' be wurried erbout me, missus. Folkes ul show know' I ain't been jecked up by de hair ob de head, and dat I ain't nebber staid 'roun' no poo' white trash."

"I know you are the best Hannah to me in the world, but one's servants are on par with the old adage, 'a person is judged by the company they keep,' so the conduct of a servant is a very

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accurate tape by which the housewife is measured. Were there many people?"

"Yas'um, holy Moses, yas'um, de hole face ob de yearth was kivered. De Lawd only knows whar dey comed f'um. I sho' don't. Dat is de purtiest place you ever seed in your life, missus, but yander comes Miss Dolly. She will tell you. I dun said 'nuf, anyhow, 'case niggers don't talk, nohow."

"Yes, Hannah, that is splendid logic, that you should at all times remember. Push my chair in my room." As she neared the door, Nina came up the front steps, a smile covering her sweet face.

"Ah! Auntie dear! How we wished for you to-day—we spoke of you several times."

"Sho' did, missus, dat's de truf," put in Hannah.

"I thought perhaps you would enjoy this, so I came to bring it with my own hands."

"Precious, sweet hands, they are, too, dear, and lips, too," drawing her down and kissing her fondly. "I will place her chair, Hannah, while you bring me a drink of cool water. I am starving for a drink, fresh and cool from the well." Dolly placed the chair of the cripple near the window, where a cool breeze wafted the perfume of a gorgeous flower-bed, fanned the heated summer into pleasant May. Drawing a hassock, she sat at her beloved Auntie Betty's feet.

"For more reasons than one, I longed for you

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to-day. Oh, your heart would have leaped for joy, dear aunty, at demonstrations and repeated proofs of esteem, and profound confidence the people liberally displayed to-day. If it was possible for him to be puffed with the winds of flattery, he has a sufficient amount."

"To bust him," said Aunt Betty.

"Yes," laughing heartily. The two very confidentially talked on and on, finally drifting back to the first subject.

"Has George hinted to you, aunty, that he is eminently preferred to any other man as representative?"

"No, child; you know him too well to ask if he has. He would feel like he was boasting himself to even insinuate such a thing. I doubt very seriously his accepting the honor if it is offered him."

"Why? Oh, I hope he will! They are so urgent, and will be more so as the time draws nearer."

"I know him, better than the outside world does. While I haven't heard him express himself on this particular subject, I know there will be only one point that will plead the cause, and that you know."

"No, I don't, just the one you refer to, as there are so many sadly needed ones staring any thoughtful person in the face, whether politician or not. I truly do not, but which one do you think will influence him?"

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"Why, the one that has been choked out for several terms."

"Oh, yes, the court-house subject; I should have thought, too, for you can hear nothing else, and the second address to-day dealt extensively with the subject, making some strongly urgent, impressive, lasting points, that opened the eyes of numbers indifferently inclined as hearers. The day was one that will be long remembered by the visitors, and aunt, a more beautiful spot I never saw. The location was truly an ideal one, and it so impressed me of Fairyland, so dreamy is the appearance, a grand and gorgeous grouping of stately oaks, a mass of airy trailing gray moss, suspended gracefully by the cunning fingers of time, attentively keeping watch over the saucy, long-stemmed daisies, the blushing Sweet Williams, that so profusely blend their beauty with the nodding plume-like cattails that border the mill stream, as it lazily winds its way on and on. Did you know he owned this property?"

"Yes, child, for several years."

"Aunty, it would be worth an untold amount to you, to spend a short while out there. Oh, it would be fun to get you in the boat and let you pull the exquisite, large water lilies, as we drifted from place to place, watching the cork of your fishing line bob up and down as the little fishes nibbled your bait, occasionally catching a perch about so big," holding up her hand,

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"often enough to keep one from dozing or being discouraged."

"I think I shall surely visit this obscure Eden. George insisted that I go with him a few days ago, but I did not feel like taking the bumps over the rough road."

"They are not bad in the least. Do go at the first opportunity."

"Will you go with me?"

"Oh, aunty, you know I will, gladly, if you will arrange the day when I can leave my work. I can't possibly leave my precious boys and girls. They are doing excellent work. The parents are delighted. We are to have a pretty little programme two weeks from Friday night. Miss Dolly is going to assist me with some of the drills and elocution. The parents, with a few special friends, are all we are to have. I will get George to let me drive you over home, have your tea with mamma, and he can come after you when he can. Isn't Miss Dolly a precious darling, aunty? I have been told that she is a very rare type of perfect woman. I love her because she loves your boy, and he idolizes her. Aren't they sweet together? Sometimes I tremble when I look at them in their mutual happiness. Their haven is so bright—not a semblance of a cloud visible, fearing lest some unknown foe is lurking near, with yawning jaws and fiend-like eyes, only awaiting its chance to devour and strike asunder the heavenly bliss that encompasses them now. I earnestly pray

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that my fancies are nonsensical, and, for Heaven's sake, don't breathe this to a living thing, aunty."

"What do you base your misgivings on, child?"

"I can't tell. It's another case of just because. Oh, I am simple sometimes, aunty; I almost hate myself for being a dunce. But you are the only one except mamma that I have to express myself to, and she is so tired and burdened with the trouble of others, that I haven't the heart to trouble her. I am so worried about her that I am distracted half my time."

"Bless her precious soul, this will be a saddened spot of God's world when the angels lift her to the happy home. No feet can fill her precious shoes. No hand can soothe the aching head, no voice can still the troubled heart like hers."

"Oh! Aunty, aunty! No heart would bleed like mine, and oh! I feel that the time is not a lengthy one. She wears a smiling face, but I can see the symptoms of suffering behind those smiles. She is giving herself up as a living martyr in the Master's harvest. Often when she thinks me asleep, I watch her, on her knees begging and pleading for some one. Her rest is not half taken, and she does not touch her meals much of the time." Nina dropped her head on the knees that held her hands and wept sorely, before Aunt Betty could quiet her.

"You must get up now, and bathe your eyes

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and get your hat ready; when George comes, I will make him take you home."

"Oh, no, aunty! I had rather walk. I want to be alone. I must hurry. 'Tis growing late."

"Ah, pshaw! You need a scolding, or a real, old-time spanking, just which you escape your obedience at present will terminate. There he is now. Hannah, tell your Master George to come to me before he has the horses put up."

George came hurriedly in, kissing aunty, and pitching a handful of delicious large peaches into their laps. He drew a large rocker near, and swung himself comfortably in it, saying: "I am lazily awaiting your commands, my precious aunty."

"Can't you tell me the news of the day?"

"If I should rack my brain with a magnifying lens till the last particle was repeatedly searched, I could not scrape a vestige that had not already been criticised."

"You are sadly off your base, my dear Mr. Allwane. Other than a few remarks, I have left the honor to you," said Nina, indignantly jesting.

"Are you right sure?" asked he. "In that case, you deserve a blue ribbon, and my protection home; get your hat, dear girl."

"That is what I wanted of you, boy," turning her chair so that she could see them as they walked to the waiting buggy.

"What's the matter with those eyes, my dear girl? I see traces of tears, sister mine."

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"You are surely mistaken, George; I am as happy as a bird." She dared not trust herself to meet the searching gaze she felt without a forced exertion. She swallowed and choked the tears that stubbornly tried to make their appearance. Succeeding in doing it, she quickly talked of other things.

"Is Mr. Sapp to take you out this evening, Nina?"

"Yes."

"All right; if he were not, Nina, I would have. There is something troubling you, Nina; can't you trust your big brother? Perhaps I may be able to help you, or at least advise you." He looked down into her face. She saw in his eyes an expression that readily tore asunder every barrier that was shut in her bosom, the confidence that had previously been withheld.

"Oh, George, you truly are the only big brother I have ever known. But, oh pshaw, it's nothing."

"Nina, it grieves me no little to see the hesitancy that I never dreamed existed."

"Really, I don't hesitate, but the subject," heartily laughing.

"Has Sapp popped the question, or is this the accepted time? Jingo, Nina, your face is a greater tell-tale than you are; won't you admit it?"

"Yes, that is just what I wanted to have your opinion about. Here we are home now. So you just ask for more time, and we will con-

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sider the question in the very near future. Mother is here, won't you say a word to her? Where is——"

"The horses won't stand. Go, tell Old Mother I wish to see her, and be sure you see the exercises this eve. What can be the matter with you, is your heart on the brink of bursting since all this fuss over you, little cracker?" said mother.

"Yes, mother; there is the only savior for me, and that is for you to come with me and let me show how well my horses can travel."

"They are beauties, I'll declare, George. They are the prettiest I ever saw."

Handing her in, with little Ben between them, he drove them around by home, insisting the two old friends chat a few moments over their tea, while he gave a few orders about the supplies to go very early to the farms. Joining them, he ate a hasty meal, carried Old Mother home, and was ready for the evening.

CHAPTER X.

"Come in, Mr. Allwane. The ladies will be in presently."

As they were seated, Mr. Blankley was announced. The three were soon engrossed in the all-absorbing topic.

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"Yes, indeed, sir; the opportunities that present themselves to me," said George, "are rare and rich."

"You are aware of your advantages. How long have you been here, may I ask?"

"Oh, several years."

"How long?" said Mr. Allwane.

"This is the eighth year. My loss was great indeed, nearly two years ago, in the loss of the entire machinery and a portion of the mill."

"Is that true? You were insured, of course?"

"No, none that you could count. There is the mystery of the thing; my policies expired three days before the fire."

"You have no clew as to the cause?"

"Oh, no! We never know these things, you know, until they are ferreted out."

"But you are surely going to make an effort to find the cause, Mr. Vining?"

"You bet I am, sir, if there is a man in the service with brains enough," said he laughing.

The door opened and the girls walked in.

"I had almost concluded that you had turned the charitable hand and left us to our glory," he said, winking at the gentlemen.

"You are complimentary to-night, father."

Delia seated herself near George and entirely monopolized his attention. After a few joking words, Mr. Vining bade them good night.

As they rose to go, Delia, in her impertinent, impudent glory, said: "I would feel as though my sin was unpardonable if I dared molest such

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happiness as you are wrapped up in Dolly. So Mr. Allwane and I will lead the way."

They had just started for the school house for the entertainment, which had been arranged by Nina for her scholars.

For just an instant, as if a dagger was at her very heart, Dolly would not have suffered more intense pain. She glanced at George, and the puzzled, anxious, disappointed anger that flashed over his face told Dolly that he, too, was wounded. Smiling sweetly, Dolly said:

"The hand of kindness has our pleasure in charge this eve."

"I have arrived at the same conclusion." Colonel Blankly was indeed pleased, as much so as were the lovers disappointed. Of course there was nothing to do but swallow the inevitable. The kindly, entertaining, unselfish, unintentional arrangement, she felt, was conscientiously construed by all parties. The success of her scheme enthused her, and her bright smiles, jolly laughing and agreeable comments, forced them to this conclusion.

"Oh, I know she didn't intend any selfish motive. The very absurd idea of my even hinting at my dear, sweet Delia doing such a thing. Oh, what has possession of me?" she thought. Dolly would have confessed and asked her forgiveness, so stung by remorse was she, and at once banished the thought, vowing she would never allow it to happen again. She wanted her to admire her lover, and everybody else, as far as

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that was concerned; she was delighted to have her dearest, best friend look sweetly in his face, and she often manoeuvred so that Delia would be near him.

They had been seated but a few minutes when Mr. Sapp and Nina joined them.

The curtain rose, and the exercises of the evening began. The recitations, music and dialogues were far above the average for a community with so few advantages.

Indeed, to an observer, as the glance wandered leisurely over the beautiful picture, viewing with admiration the gorgeously wooded landscape, the fertile soil, sending forth its crops abundantly, and inviting fabulous returns to divers profit-aiming in the battlefield of the surging world of business. The settlers of this portion of the state of Alabama had labored under grave difficulties. Blessed with a rich, fertile soil, adapted to the successful production of a vast wealth in inconceivable riches, wrapped in the densely pine forests, but isolated from the means of transportation, very few indeed in the infancy of these parts would brave these obstacles. However, success crowned their primeval efforts, thereby encouraging others, as years passed.

More and more cast their lots here, foregoing present comfort for the brighter prospect of future gain. These rare advantages were wafted far and wide. The people of this section boasted of a great railroad, which was built just a few

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years previous to this great and wonderful addition to our remote portion—the fine school structure—and it was at the time our high school at Allwanesville astounded its visitors, and its scholars hurled the billet of competition at its more fortunate sisters, eliminating the inferior impressions prevailing at that time.

She proudly exhibited her pupils in the row of unpolished material in the bright-faced boys, the coming men of the country, men with able bodies, strong, active, receptive brain power, experience a strong dare and do will that is an absolute essential to eminent success in the world of scheming business. Just as an expert at the sight and touch of a rare diamond in its rough, rude unpolished state, knows the value, as readily did the visitor at Nina's side see in these boys indications convincing and encouraging.

Especially attracted was he to two, of course the brightest, who came out in a very deep and interesting debate. The subject was the all-absorbing question of the hour.

"That is indeed able. Why, do you know, Mr. Allwane, that subject is handled with as much skill as it could be by old, experienced men. This is a treat. I regret my friend could not stay."

"I thought he was to stay," said Mr. Allwane.

"Yes, so he was, but that is the fruits of wedded bliss. His wife was not well when he left,

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and, finding he could make his train, I believe I couldn't have kept him for anything. He was like myself, however, judging present by past experience, neither one of us was very anxious to burden this audience with our presence."

"Indeed, colonel, an honest confession is good for the soul. We like your frank confession," said Delia.

"That is one of my besetting sins, Miss Vining."

"It is at least refreshing," she replied, laughing. "I am delighted, Colonel Blankly, at your acknowledged, unexpected pleasure of our ability, and if you will for a moment only come with me, refreshing your dormant supply of memory as we stroll down the streets of a long and rugged past, viewing with adoration the crumbling bones of the most patriotic, noble, self-sacrificing men, with gigantic brain power. The bended knee of all nations join in one loud voice of praise at their shrine, and on a few paces farther, while yet the harmonious sounds linger in your hearing, you spy in the distance a scene fresh on your memory because of your immediate surroundings inferior, however, in progress. You will agree with me that we from our remote but sufficient soil will, in the near future, send out from our little corner men who will wear the laurels of their time as did our fathers from regions very similar."

"Bravo! Oh, I am prouder still of your ire," replied he.

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The party joined him in a hearty laugh at her flushed face and agitated voice.

"But, come, now, Miss Drewery, let's be friends. I must beg that you consider my remarks, and you will find that I was all praise, admitting my premature impressions. Now, let's be friends, won't you? When I go to-morrow, the sweet pleasure may not be mine again in a time to be with you on an occasion like this. Oh, I beg of you to grant me a pardon!"

A confused, surprised expression showed plainly in her eyes. Looking from one to another, as if to get her bearings, and feeling sure his talk was more or less jesting, she was surprised at the hint of anger or agitation which her manner seemingly conveyed. She was at a loss just how she should make her reply, but concluding the while, as a joke on her, she said: "Since you so earnestly desire a pardon yourself, naming the offense, I freely and unreservedly grant your request."

The curtain rose, and all eyes were centered on the stage, feasting on the wit and humor of a two-act comedy.

This being the closing scene, he was sent to congratulate the deserving boys and girls, encouraging them with bright pictures of noble, useful man and womanhood. The answers of some of them were readily responsive, others hung their heads, and very shame-facedly murmured: "Thank you." One in particular, a nervous fellow of eleven or twelve, when told

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of how well he did, grabbed a wisp of his hair and began to twist it vigorously in his thumb and finger, saying:

"Yes, sir; I is doing all I can. I loves to go to school. My ma says I must study hard, so I can help her to send the other children as they get big enough."

"Are there many of the other children?" asked Nina.

"Yes'um, a lot of them; five besides myself."

"You don't live here, do you?"

"No, ma'am; I walks five miles, night and morning, but I likes the walk; it makes me feel better; my ma is the one that grieves the most about it. She has to work so hard. You know, lady, my pa, he's been dead three years, and the children are all babies, you might say. I works after school, and all helps a little, so we manage to get along," said he, still twisting his little wisp of hair.

The bright and happy expression on his face was all that kept Nina's tears of sympathy from streaming down her cheeks. She put her hand on the boy's shoulder, drawing him closer, and in a low tone her kind, sweet voice won from him the information she desired. Giving him all the encouragement she could under the circumstances, she hurried on with the others who had preceded her.

The programme for the next day was agreed on. They had persuaded Colonel Blankly to remain over. As they strolled along, the moon

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shed a soft, silvery light, as the soft rays penetrated the waving boughs that drooped gracefully over the way, casting weird, fanciful, flitting shadows that so fully reflected Nina's feelings that she was painfully mortified when she was twice forced to ask Mr. Sapp to repeat his earnest pleadings. Rousing herself, she succeeded in throwing off to an extent the premonitive impressions. His pleadings were so urgent, desperately earnest, that she replied:

"Mr. Sapp, in searching the recesses of my heart, and realizing the sacred duty that God and man hold rigidly high and equally or more sacred, I find no trace of the love that is essential to the honor and loyal obedience that a true wife should hold for her husband. I thank you from the depths of my heart for the honor, and beg a continuation of the friendship that to me has been a great source of beneficial pleasure, a spring from which has flowed a bountiful supply of refreshing food for my inexperienced mind to feast on, making bright many lonely hours."

Catching her hand in both of his, and pressing them painfully hard, he looked down in her eyes, and said, with a determined voice that made her shiver:

"Miss Drewery—no, my Nina!—do you think I want to hear such words from your lips? Don't try to release your hands from those that will henceforth love and protect you."

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"You are hurting my hand."

"My hand, please," said he. "My darling, do you think my love is so weak as to quail or be satisfied, as to so easily give you up? No man living ever offered a truer love than I offer you."

"I appreciate and profoundly respect the honor. But, I could never be your wife, Mr. Sapp."

"You will—I will win your heart," and, grabbing her to his bosom, planted a kiss on her cheek, regardless of her resistance. "There," as he unwound his arms from her, and hissed through his set teeth, "there, my own darling, I will not give you up. You are mine, just as true as the touch of my lips is sacred before my God to-night."

"It would be better for both of us, Mr. Sapp, if you would only believe me."

She saw the expression on his face, and she felt like screaming. She had previously been very fond of his society, and admired him because of his widely traveled and intelligent conversational ability to her who knew nothing of the wide, wide world, except from books, other than an occasional trip to the capital city and the nearby town. Now, as she looked at him, she felt a thrill of horror seize her—a chill of dread. She wanted to run away from him.

"Oh, if the earth would only open and swallow me for the time being!" she thought.

As they neared the gate, he stopped, took her

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hand, and held it firmly, disregarding her efforts to release it. Looking into her very soul, so intent was he, saying in a soft, persuasive voice:

"My darling, you must promise me here that you will be my wife."

"Mr. Sapp, I repeat that I know I could never love you well enough to be your wife."

"You will love me, do you hear me, child? I will make you love me. You shall! You may think you do not, but deep in your heart there is a spark of love that will grow at once to a flaming light. Then you will hang your sweet head in shame at your cruel resistance and cold, harsh words. Will you say this, and look me in the face? Will you truthfully say, my dear, I will not resist the love, I will not try to quench the love I have, as it may grow?"

"I will promise you that if there is a spark of love in my heart, it shall remain there."

Raising her hand to his lips, he said: "I will see you to-morrow."

Closing the door, she went to her mother's room, tipping softly for fear of disturbing her. She watched her a while, and, noting her excited nervous movements, her mother asked:

"What on earth is the matter, child? You act like you are frightened to death."

"No, I am not particularly frightened. The walk was too much for me, and I also have a dreadful headache." She looked at her mother, who had raised up. "Do I look very bad, mother?"

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"No; but there is something unusual, my dear, something more than mere headache?"

"Yes, mother," going to the bed.

"Sit beside me, Nina, and tell me what it is."

Complying with her mother's wish, she put her head down in her mother's arms, and, with a feeling of timidity and embarrassment that every girl feels when relating the thrilling experience of a proposal of marriage. This with Nina, however, was not with pride, as in other cases; instead, she was filled with a vague something akin to fear, but not fear.

"What is the matter with me, mother? When he looked at me, oh! I wanted to get away from him. He vowed I should love him, that I would learn to love him. I told him positively that I could not, and that I would not be his wife, and then he had such a dreadful, desperate look, oh, he is so positively in dead earnest." She stopped to get her breath and hear her mother's comment. Hearing none, she went on again, talking herself almost faint, asking: "Oh, mother, what will I do?"

"Why, child, just wait, that's all. It will come around all right," said her mother, so very calmly that Nina raised her head quickly, with an expression of surprised amazement.

"All you need, honey, is to think just a moment, and get your excited senses to going properly; then you will realize that because a man swears he loves you until he's black and blue in the face, and loves you harder than a 'brick-bat,'

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stronger than the rock of Gibraltar, that does not make it so; now, undress, as quick as you can, and if you will go to sleep like a sensible girl, you will get up in the morning the same sweet Nina that you have ever been. The day has passed when women were shipped here and there, by the carload, and sold for a string of blue beads or a box of chewing-tobacco and taken to wife regardless. Don't you fret, child, you will wake up Nina Drewery a good many mornings yet," laughing heartily at her.

Nina braced up, and began to realize the truth and humor of her mother's advice, and, forcing a smile, said: "I suppose you are right, mother; I will just wait."

"The Lord will bring it safely through," joined the mother.

After commenting on the day and night proceeding, she kissed her mother fondly, thanking her for staying at home, and for the sweet comfort she was to her, asking: "Why she was not with the little sick child?"

"You may thank dear Dolly for this night's rest."

"She is the sweetest angel on earth, mother. I love her so much."

"So does every one who knows her. Oh! she has such a sweet way of winning one. She has the child and mother both in love with her, and her care of him is perfect. She went there when the exercises were over, and begged that I come

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home and rest to-night—the note came just at dark, so I came home.”

“Bless her dear heart; she thinks always of some one else.”

CHAPTER XI.

“Oh! I was afraid you would not come,” said the restless little fellow, tossing and nervous, as she smilingly went to his bed.

“Didn’t I tell you, sweetheart, that I would come? Now, for a tale and to sleep,” she said, as she pushed up her sleeve preparatory to bathing his burning head and limbs.

“No; a song, please, ma’am,” said he, looking wistfully at her.

“All right, my love; just as you like.” Sitting on the side of the bed, she sang softly and sweetly his favorite song, busy applying the cool towels, and soon he was quiet. She continued some time ere he slept; finally the mother peeped in to see if he was, and, noting the motion from Dolly to be quiet, she knew the little one was resting, so tipping in with a fresh basin of water, she stooped and kissed Dolly on the cheek, uttering a fervent “thank God,” then took up the basin and went out.

Soon the child slept soundly. Arranging his covering, she went in search of the mother. Guessing her feelings, she found her, as expect-

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ed, sitting alone in the dark on the back porch, crying.

"Just as I thought, my dear, when I came for you."

"No, no," said the mother, taking her hand and drawing a chair near her. "Dolly, sit here. You thought me weeping for sorrow. I am, of course, sad, but I am so thankful that my precious God has raised from the stones, as it were, sweet friends, oh! more, a thousand times, more—ministering angels. My sweet friend, you will never know—you can't. Oh, God forbid your ever being in a position to know how thankful, how happy, if one so forsaken, as I could be happy. It was when I saw that my precious, suffering darling could find rest in the hands of loved ones. He has had a bad day, and you are worn out, my dear, tired love."

"I have thought of you, even though I was away. I have prayed for God's consoling presence. I could see that precious little upturned face in everything. We had a pleasant day, 'twas so very restful to sit in the cool shade of such magnificent oaks. I do wish you could see them. The day was one of beautiful, sweet memories. The addresses were instructive, and especially so was the audience."

"They were Greek to your cultivated, unaccustomed eyes, dear, I know it."

"You need not admit your surprised amazement."

"No! Oh, no, my dear, not that."

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"I only want to go to each one individually, and insist, nay plead, with the parents, too, for their own sake, for the child's sake, to take advantage of this grand, God-sent opportunity. It is encouraging to see what splendid success those that are impressed are making. You would have appreciated immensely the exercises this evening at the academy."

"I know I would, but you can tell me."

Dolly kept her busy listening for an hour or two. Finding her more enthused, and her mind relieved of its gloom, she sent her to bed.

Later on Nina's mother came and spent the remainder of the night in a solitary watch at the bedside of the child, and Dolly went home.

CHAPTER XII.

The moon was fast turning her soft, silvery-lighted face to greet the expectants of some other world. The stars were few and tiny from their remoteness.

Mr. Sapp walked down the shadowy street or road, having controlled his features, which only a short time ago were so agitated, and so profoundly absorbed in urging and pleading to Nina; yes, swearing to be her true and only love.

He had just stepped from the postoffice, as he returned from Nina's home, holding in his hand

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a letter which he had gotten from the box, and, noting the strangely familiar handwriting, said: "No, impossible; absolutely, no! Oh, the devil!" tearing open the envelope taking out the folded sheet and striking a match. He scanned the contents.

"Oh, tarnation such trash!" he reeled and would have fallen had not a friendly voice awakened him and put him on his guard.

"What's the matter old boy? You reel about like a drunken fool. Say, comrade, what's the matter, I say?" shaking him, as if to rouse the man stricken.

Sapp's eyes were wide open, and the veins in his head and neck, swollen like whip-cords, were throbbing and surging; his brain was whirling, his breathing was heavy, and his teeth clinched and lips firmly set. He held in his hand the picture of a sweet, girlish, trusting face, which looked up into his, with soft blue eyes dancing with delight. A muffled groan escaped his firmly-set teeth.

"What in the devil is the matter with you, you idiotic fool? Has some of your sins found you out, old boy? Well, if that's it, you are a mighty weak gosling. Get up from here, and collect the little sense you have left, and let me report my success," shaking him vigorously.

"Oh, pshaw, Joe! Don't worry me. I can't hear you to-night. My God! What a hideous, revenging demon is about to overtake me! I must have time to think—a very unexpected bit

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of news. I have just received the most unexpected, disastrous, destructive—my God, I never thought of such a thing! Oh, the devil, I must do something. Leave me, now, Joe; I must think.”

“Can’t you let me on to it?”

“Not to-night; to-morrow. Come to the office, and we will consider our plans—only leave me now, for God’s sake, or I will go raving mad.”

“I think, by Geminy, if you ain’t that now, I’m a sucker. I wouldn’t cut up like that if the stars fell. If anything could be worse, it is this.”

He turned abruptly around and walked rapidly away, looking expectantly about, as if fearing some one would grab him, his quivering body haggard and drawn, his distorted features, causing him to look the second time as he rushed into his room, slammed the door and glanced at himself in the glass as he passed the dresser. “Well, if I didn’t know this was me, I would swear it wasn’t. My God, I must get myself right. That glass don’t lie, and I know that is the worst-looking face man ever wore. Nina, my sweet, pure Nina, if you had the faintest hint of the contents of this, you would loathe the very sound of my name,” holding the letter, reading again the tormenting words:

“Oh! my own dear husband, if you could see your beautiful, big boy, your heart would surely come back to the two loving hearts that are for-

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ever yours. I hear you are at a small town called Allwanesville. If I don't hear from you, darling, I am coming. Still your faithful, forsaken, Ella."

Picking up a match, he held the flame under the letter until it was in ashes. "Ah," chuckled he, "ashes tell no tales."

The hideous, demon-like expression, the imaginary concocting disposition of this sudden obstacle eliminated partially the bitter remorse, mingled with hate, as black and heartless as midnight in a dreary dungeon, his depraved soul steeped in the very dregs of sin and deception, had often times faced the border of discovery, but the obedient brazen will mastered by a manouvering, speculating, ready wit, had borne him triumphantly above detection and suspicion, and now, after the momentary maddening cruelty, the reproachful spasms had passed. The familiar demons fly with their dastardly dissimulating schemes. Polishing his disciplined, deceptive features, he stepped out securely, and mingled with his fellow-men, a pleasant and agreeable apple, thoroughly rotten at heart.

The remainder of the night he tossed from side to side of his bed, planning, realizing the necessity of quick actions, coupled with the prompt and faithful aid of his ally.

The sun rose in all his shining glory—the birds were singing happily as they chased each other from limb to limb in the large tree at his window. The bright beams danced joyfully

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through the green foliage and silently stole into his room, bidding him to be up and out. The inspiring, quiet happiness was transmitted like magic to the tortured, remorseful man, as he sprang from the bed.

Very carefully he made himself ready for the day. Standing long before the mirror, noting minutely every feature, finally gratifying his exacting vanity, he walked leisurely and very dignified to the office. His assumed air of importance would impress an observer as a man of marked and rigid morals, and an appreciative Christian gentleman.

"Ah! Good morning, Mr. Sapp! I was just wondering if you were sick, but, by Jinks, you look to me like a man in perfect mental and physical condition. No," looking up as if to discuss something, "since I see you closer, you show plain traces of fatigue. Your selfishness to inhale and absorb the rare feast of fresh air, good 'rashons' and good, sound, digestible brain, was too rich for your store house."

"That's true. Yes, sir, Mr. Vining, that's true; may I presume to beg the indulgence of your already appreciated kindness for an hour or two to-day? I am one of the invited guests at the home of Mr. Allwane."

"By all means—to be sure. Have all the time necessary."

"The madam and yourself are included, are you not?"

"Yes, that was my instructions when I left

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home this morning. I meant to get here an hour earlier, but those rascally, mischievous girls played a trick on me. What do you reckon it was? They had wife and I searching for my hat, while they sat rocking and laughing."

The old man was a bit agitated yet, but, realizing the joke, he fell back in his office-chair and laughed heartily.

The two men turned to their desks and had nothing more to say. Honor and integrity is never uneasy, watching and ever alert, never fearing the unexpected arrival of an unknown foe.

The elderly man, with his head bent low over his work, wholly absorbed, not thinking or caring whose eyes were bent on him.

The other, his head inclined, his brain full of mean, treacherous, scheming crimes, his guilty conscience reflected plainly in the eyes that were constantly turning from ledger to man. Had the absorbent work of the first had cause to look unaware on the other, many sleepless nights and bitter regrets might have been averted. A pity we never see just what we ought.

"Well, how did you find everything?" said Mr. Simpkins, as he walked in.

"Why, all right, as far as I know, Joe. How did you manage?" A shadow momentarily passed over his countenance—unobserved, however.

"Fine; I had no trouble at all. Of course, I made no attempt to do any work in here."

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"No, certainly not," looking at his watch, closing his books, drawing down the top of his desk and locking it, both men walked out.

Neither spoke until some distance from the office. They stopped, talked in subdued tones, and as Sapp's time was limited, he hurried on.

Nina was standing on the front porch when Sapp approached.

"Had you given me up, Miss Nina?"

"I could not imagine what detained you."

He made a few apologies, just as others did under like circumstances.

As Nina's voice sounded through the house, Aunt Betty called her: "Take my chair, honey, and let me see what's going on, my child. I have needed you more this morning, and have missed the use of my limb more than I ever did."

"My dear, dear aunty, I would have come earlier, but I promised to come with Mr. Sapp."

"Pshaw, sapling's foot in the bandbox."

"I thought of you, aunty, and told mother how much I regretted my negligence." Then she went to the dining room.

"Oh! how perfectly lovely! Oh! this is the most beautiful place I ever saw. Who arranged the table, aunty? Oh! those exquisite roses. This would flatter the king; nothing is needed here. You feel like a swell waiter, don't you, Ned?" said Nina, addressing a negro youth standing near the handsome sideboard polishing

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glasses and grinning, happy in his dress for the occasion.

"Just look here, aunty! Isn't this a dream? Here you are," throwing her arms about Dolly. "I knew you did this. It's just like you," kissing and holding her at arms-length, admiring her lovingly, then embracing her again.

"That's enough, child; leave a spark of life in her for the rest of us."

"What an artist! I have just been admiring the beautiful arrangement of everything. Does George know?"

"Oh, no! Not for the world would I have him know. I would not dare be so presumptuous; I feel as though I want to apologize to something," said Dolly, her face flushed. "But, no I don't, for I know it was relieving to you, wasn't it, my dear Aunt Betty? If she could have walked, I would never have dared. I happened to step in the hall just after we came, and heard her grieving over your not coming, and over the arrangement of the dining room. So I could not be still."

"And that, that, and that," kissing her, "is a feeble token of my love, for your needy thoughtfulness. Oh! how happy we will soon be."

"I hope the time will fly," said Dolly, referring to their marriage.

"No one wishes it half so much as I," said Aunt Betty.

"Do you really, Aunt Betty?" asked Dolly,

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twining her arms about the cripple's shoulders and taking her face between her palms. "Do you know, aunty, I have been afraid that you would not love me, knowing the mutual love between you. I feared you would feel that I was trespassing."

"Oh, I am so thankful! I have prayed so earnestly for this special blessing. Now, carry me along with you to the parlor. I trust to you two now the perfecting of the appearance and arrangement of everything. Just before dinner is announced you had better drill Ned a little, he is such a numbskull."

"Very well, aunty. Don't you worry any more." They pushed her chair near a large, open window, where the ladies were chatting.

As Dolly came near, Delia looked daggers at her, and remarked: "It is sadly appalling to witness such willful impertinent charity. We have evidence of such marked strides, that ere long we will be converted, soul and body, into a salvation camp."

With every eye darting from one to the other in surprised inquiry, Aunt Betty very calmly said: "A greater addition could not be asked for."

Dolly made no reply, but walked to the piano and sang a jolly little ballad; then, by request, several old-time songs. Aunt Betty vowed there was no music in these new-fangled ones.

The music had its mesmeric charm. Soon the

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men joined in, and a short time before the announcement of dinner, a happier crowd could never be found anywhere.

Dolly, as true as her word, slipped out, and carefully examined every arrangement and drilled Ned to perfection, joining the party later, none of them the wiser.

The embittered, revengeful, sarcastic disposition of Delia was more thoroughly aggravated when the guests were ushered to the table. Aunt Betty, in her positive manner, placed them as though they had been rehearsed, to the perfect happiness of all, but Delia, who would surely have been in Dolly's place had she in any way had a hand in the placing, nor was she as amiable in her disappointment as Nina the evening before. Dolly, who was near, grew suspicious, and watched the intense glance of anger from Delia, as she would be joining the rest in arguing a point or a laugh.

The afternoon was spent very pleasantly indeed. Throwing formality aside, all indulged in personal pleasure, just as inclination demanded.

"Positively, father, I never enjoyed a day half so much in all my life. Everything in and about that home bespeaks of perfect happiness and contentment."

"Well, by Jove, wife, I am of the same opinion. That old soul that rolls about in her chair is a jewel. I'll bet she will tell you just what she thinks of you before you can turn around."

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"Yes, she is plain spoken, but she is a blessed good creature. She is loved dearly by all the poorer people. She did a great, good work before she was crippled. I suppose she is reconciled to the idea of George getting married."

"Ah, ha! there's the woman—sure to suppose or wonder," said Mr. Vining. "If she knew Dolly as we do, she would hasten the time, if possible. Where are the girls?"

"Colonel Blankly and Delia strolled down the street a little while ago. Mr. Allwane and Dolly were standing by the gate the last I saw of them," replied Mrs. Vining.

When George kissed Dolly good-by, she ran into the house and changed her dress for one more comfortable, and, taking her hat in hand, she stole quietly out of the gate, and went again to the sick child.

She found him as usual—restless, nervous, and fretful. She sang, bathed and soon talked him into quietness.

The mother left the room as soon as Dolly was seated by the child, not having much to say. Dolly went in quest of her as soon as she felt the child rested soundly enough.

"Just what I feared, when I looked into your face," said Dolly, placing her arms about her and kneeling by her chair.

"Tell me, dear heart, if you can, what has hurt you so badly. Can't I help you?"

"No, no, no, dear comforter," she almost whispered. "No one in this world can help me.

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Why does the Lord suffer me to keep breathing in this agony?"

Dolly was bewildered at her subdued tones, but made no comment.

To her surprise, she heard a sound coming from the room near them. A mumbling, angry, confused sound, which was followed by a terrible, scarcely audible oath.

The sad woman clinched her hand closer, hiding her face on Dolly's shoulder, as if to shut out the sound.

"Now you know, dear, how deep the dagger is buried in my heart. I look at one, and my heart is torn from its place in sympathy, love and utter helplessness to relieve the other. Oh! how it does hurt, I can't tell; every sense is paralyzed, I am killed. Oh! my darling, once I painted my future with the brightest colors. My castles were more elaborate than imaginary Solomon's. There was not a crevice left for an atom of sorrow I could not arrange, when warned for naught but happiness, when I would try to see as they who were not blinded by love."

Dolly was speechless. The awful truth of this poor woman's pitiable plight struck her so forcibly, benumbing her sympathies so utterly that she could not frame an appropriate word to save her life. She could only draw her closer, suffer with her silently, and no human disposition rendered her capable of such deep feelings. She earnestly and sincerely grieved for this sor-

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rowing heart, and while she sat so closely bound to her, a more fervent pleading intercession was seldom, if ever, offered for a suffering sister. She threw aside all thought of pleasure, and gladly buckled on the armor of a child of God, helping, if she could, the sorrowing and needy. Their silence was broken by the repetition of the same guttural sound, and a call for the wife. She hastened to him.

The sound roused the child. Dolly went to him, trying every possible means of quieting him.

The night was far spent before the antidotes were effective, and the husband could be quiet long enough to beckon sleep and rest. While the mechanical movements of the wife and mother, continuously going from one to the other, were heard into the wee small hours. With the peaceful calm that noiselessly puts the night to rest, and ushers in the tumultuous day, came a short space of rest and sleep for the wreck of a man.

Dolly was tired and worn when day was bright enough so she could see. She ceased from her place of care and watch of the child. Leaving the mother asleep from exhaustion, beside her darling, clasping his little hand in hers, as if fearing something would take him from her, face nestled close to his, she started for her home, when she saw that they were resting quietly. Her presence at Mrs. Vining's that evening was missed, and comments on the folly

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of such an unwise course as she was pursuing were indulged in.

She went to her room, unobserved by any of the family. Drawing the curtains closely, she threw herself across the bed.

When she opened her eyes again, the sun was long on his daily travel, and Delia was standing with her hands on the foot of the bed, looking down at her with a snarling smile.

"Are you going to sleep all day, Dolly?" said she. "Doubtless you feel more inclined to do that, than the request of your friend."

"You have the wrong impression, dearie. I feel just fine, and my friend's request is my pleasure, my sweet one," putting her arm around Delia's waist, drawing her beside her on the bed.

Delia almost flinched at the kind voice and sweet words. She would have much preferred a harsh, crabbed reply.

Isn't it queer, the transformations, chameleon-like, that occur in human beings?

Encouraging this desperate jealousy by a continual sight of the manifestations of the coveted idol, to hear him extolled, see her so proud of her hero, and by far the most attractive and agonizing to her, was his great love and devotion to the object of her hate and revenge. To receive the little tokens of love from a source utterly void of deception, was to her hypocritical, unworthy, restless disposition, almost unbearable. She felt more like clutching her white

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throat, and choking her out of existence, but, by a great effort she said kindly:

"Dolly, don't you know that you are digging for yourself a very early grave; that before you reach the age of mature womanhood you will be worn out and old?"

"If that, dear Delia, is my portion, and God's will that I fill an early grave, then 'His will' not mine. But what friend did you refer to, just now?"

"Nina's brother is waiting to deliver a message."

"Yes, dear child; I know she thinks me awfully forgetful," jumping up, and making a hurried toilet. Delia was listening to Nina's message. "Ben said that I must wait for you. I know she expected me much earlier."

Handing the note to Mrs. Vining, and walking closer to Delia, she told her that she was helping Nina rehearse her pupils for the beautiful exercises to be given immediately for the benefit of the college improvement fund.

"I will spend the day over there. Can't you come for me late this afternoon, Delia? I know Nina will be delighted as well as I," she answered, getting herself ready to go and pausing at the door for her reply.

Delia, waiting a few moments, said pertly, "If papa will spare me the horse, I will come; but I most assuredly will not walk."

"Oh, I think walking is just fine. Bye-bye; I will tell Nina you are coming."

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Dolly and Ben started. Ben knew the shortest way. They went through the woods by a narrow, dim pathway.

"Ben, you must have dreamed of what I loved, is the reason you wanted to come this way. Oh, isn't it lovely—those large oaks—they are massive old fellows."

"How old do you think they are?" asked Ben.

"You have puzzled me, now, Ben. I'll go foot on that question. From the size and appearance they must be all of a century old. Just look here, I must have some of those flowers," running to a bed of gorgeous blossoms. "I will gather some for Nina," she said.

They were busy, hurrying from one beautifully fragrant spot to another, when presently they came to a steep hill. Ben, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye, jokingly bantered Dolly for a race down the hill. She agreed, and off they went.

"Oh, goodness!" yelled Dolly. "I believe I'm killed." She had stumbled, and down she came, rolling nearly as fast as she was running.

As quickly as Ben could stop, he hastened to her side, fearing she was hurt. "Oh, Miss Dolly, are you hurt? Can you get up? My gracious, is your neck broke? Gee, but I was scared. Shall I go for sister?"

Dolly was only shaken up. She was more amused at Ben's anxiety and fear, and the ridiculous, imaginary sight of herself rolling over

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and over down the hill. She raised her head, and, seeing Ben's expression, burst into a hearty laugh.

"Here, Ben, pull me up. Ben, if you won't tell this to any one, I will treat you."

A thoughtful expression came over Ben's face. He waited a moment, and, throwing up his hands, said: "It would never do to keep this. It is too good; I couldn't keep it to save my life, Miss Dolly; I do wish you could have seen yourself rolling down, just like a ball."

"Please, Ben, don't tell." He was laughing, and shaking his head to her persuasive talking. Starting on, they were soon to the spring. They drank from the gourd kept there for that purpose. She rearranged the few flowers left from the tumble. A fresh laugh came from her, as she still teased Ben not to tell on her, but the first thing he said as he ran into the house ahead of her was: "You ought to see her roll down the hill." All joined in a laugh, and she joined in with the rest.

"Did you think I had forgotten you, dear?"

"No, not that, but I could not imagine what kept you."

"I was asleep when your message came; I spent the night with Mrs. Simpkins, and was tired to death."

She did not tell Nina of her awful experience, but changed the subject, and began to plan for the success of their little undertaking. The day was a busy one, getting this part better,

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correcting another, rehearsing choruses. The little ones did their best in this particular part. They made up the deficiencies of the more difficult individual parts, and when Delia came late in the afternoon, they were just winding up.

She came in, and was much pleased, and would have them sing the second time the cheerful chorus.

"I came by the office, and have a letter for you, Nina."

She saw the postmark, and knew where it came from. She broke the seal and devoured the contents.

"What's the matter, bad news?"

"Yes, mother is not so well."

The news saddened Dolly; her heart was full of forebodings, but she crushed them and smiled brightly. Delia was disappointed when she could find no trace of sorrow or anxiety in her expression.

Nina was jubilant to know she was bearing the sad news so bravely, and pressed a sympathetic kiss when she started for home.

"Dolly, you don't want to go directly home, do you?"

"Just as you please, Delia dear."

"Let's go this way," thinking to herself by doing so that George would miss her. She did not tell Nina. She hoped to be saved the sight of them together.

Delia could scarcely control herself, fearing his appearance. She drove rapidly away, feeling

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sure the way she went was safe. The confab was spirited, and she gave herself freely to the subject, when, very unexpectedly, George appeared. Halting his horse beside them, he said:

"Miss Delia, you have Dolly with you more than I. You can't object if I deprive you of her for a few moments' pleasure, will you?" He was helping her from the buggy ere Delia could reply.

"My pleasure in the matter is not considered, it seems," she sarcastically replied. "I will drive with you to town if you will drive on."

"No, I prefer following."

"All right," said he, touching the horse with the lines. He drove around her buggy, and she was glad that they could not see the expression of hate that chilled her. He held the horse from going fast that she would not be alone, but was soon relieved at meeting Mr. Sapp strolling. She invited him for a drive, and on they went.

As soon as they were fully out of sight, the plans and wreckless, destructive scheming were gloriously discussed. The bright sparkle in her eyes were sure tokens of the green-eyed monster that reigned within. Their conversation was long and serious. So closely guarded was their tones, they were scarcely audible to themselves. They were home some minutes before Dolly came, as she had asked George to take her by his home, as she wanted to say a word to Aunt Betty, staying longer than she was aware.

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George took her home, and, having said good-bye to her, he made a few pleasant remarks to the family and drove to his home. His time was urgently taken now. Driving to the side entrance, he threw the lines to the caretaker, and joined Aunt Betty at the table.

She had prepared for the two under the vines forming a fairy nook at one end of the porch, where the last rays of the golden sunset cast its soft light, mingled with a gentle breeze from the west. The influence was magical in its peace and rest. Stooping to place the expected kiss on his aunt, he went to his room, soon returning, whistling a merry air.

The evening meal was one looked forward to by both of them as the crowning opportunity where they, unmolested, could confide and commune with each other. She having none, and he very few matured plans or secrets that were not discussed and confided at this hour of real sweet rest and pleasure.

George had some business to attend to after supper, so he said:

"I will not be away long, aunty. Hannah will stay with you. Do go to bed soon, and be sure to sleep. I will peep in to see if you are obedient."

"I shall not promise."

With hat in hand, he walked out.

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CHAPTER XIII.

The house was full of impatient men waiting for him. Calling the meeting to order, the subject under discussion was the absorbing one in this part of the county, and had been for a number of years. At the approach of each new election their efforts were renewed with vigor. To-night the interest grew to excitement and disorder, George calling on them to be more discreet and orderly, impressing them with the importance of sound thoughts and deeds.

His words were indeed effective, the remaining time of the meeting being effectively used in perfecting plans to reach and more thoroughly impress the men.

It being later than he expected when he went home, he went noiselessly in and peeped at Aunt Betty, and, finding her asleep, went to his room to try to sleep, but hours passed before he safely reached the blissful realms of dream-land.

The next few weeks were busy ones for Nina. With Dolly's untiring and valued aid in her efforts, she was repaid fully, and it was very gratifying to her. On considering the programme, Nina was advised by the parents to have the exercises in the academy. The proceeds of a full house was encouraging in the

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extreme, and the success of the children endeared Nina to the fond, appreciative parents, sealing for her the honor of moulding the tender youth into maturity.

If she so desired, she could have the school. She declined the offer, however, having accepted a position of teacher at the academy. Mr. Sapp urged her not to accept it.

His plans were to remain only a few months longer here, and pleaded with Nina to accept him, so that he might take her with him on his tour of the West.

"Believe me, Mr. Sapp, that to my limited knowledge of this great West, and the preëminent and growing desire to visit it is inspiring. If the dictates of my heart could in any measure concede to the gratifications and pleasure of my mind, I could readily accept the highly appreciative honor you bestow."

He still pressed his suit; and when, in the stillness of the night Nina tossed on her bed restlessly, she really prayed that she might learn to love this man who so deeply loved her. She would try to think of him lovingly, but something would tell her, "You don't love him; don't try."

It was very different with him. At the same time that night, he lay tossing and sleepless, reading in the future that which he would not have her know for all the world, racking his brain that he might win her, secure his destructive plan, carry out his outrageously shameful

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obligations, since his deep infatuation for Nina was his one absorbing desire: to secure the booty necessary to his needs, take her and leave the country.

He imagined her very much in love with him, and that the only obstacle in the way would be money. He realized, however, a complete revulsion of feeling. The confidence and esteem he enjoyed in the firm's president and manager rendered it a comparatively easy matter to accomplish his desired end.

The note he received opened a new source of fear and anxiety. Chuckling over the anticipated victory in his answer to the imaginary ghost that had scared him, he said: "That will put a quietus on any further inquiry, at least until I can make my escape. I must see Joe tomorrow." He felt greatly relieved after this letter had been dispatched to its destination.

The plotting of Sapp and Simpkins was wholly unknown to Delia, and when she was advising Sapp in the matter of the financial scheming to defraud her father, she little dreamed that other similar plots had been planned.

CHAPTER XIV.

The whole county now was growing enthused and agitated, and special big gatherings were held at some special place every week. They

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were going on the morrow to one of the meetings that was called in the country, and all were very jubilant over their anticipated day's pleasure.

Dolly was supremely happy these days. The knowledge of the growing popularity of her lover, the last missive from her mother saying she was entirely well, made her happy, and she drank deeply of the joys, and fervently thanked God for his loving kindness.

They started early, taking as their chaperon Nina's mother, who very reluctantly yielded after a joint persuasion and threat to take her by force.

"Why, children, I won't know how to behave, if you don't watch me; I will be so amazed at everything that I will stand still, biting my fingers and gazing so the folks will think you have an escaped lunatic with you. This is the first time I have been from home in seven years."

"Hurrah!" shouted Nina. "For this one good time in your life you will feel like a new woman, mother."

"Oh, I love to go; there is so much to see that you soon lose sight of yourself."

"Just listen at that simple child."

"Why do you call me simple, Delia?"

"I'd like to know what it is that you enjoy seeing so much that you forget yourself. I fail to see anything except a crowd of rough, uncouth, country ignoramuses."

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"That's just it—the people; but I think you are rather severe in your criticisms. After all, they are not as ignorant as we are, considering the advantages of both sides."

The day to all was far more pleasant than their most exacting expectations. Sure enough, Old Mother, except for a headache from the jolting wagon, and a slight wetting from a rain that caught them as they came home, was the only one who complained of being "done up."

They came in town singing a jolly, familiar song, all joining in, with their wagon and horses literally covered with flowers, gathering fresh ones as they came along.

They were all tired and glad to get home. Delia managed to usurp a greater portion of Mr. Allwane's leisure moments, consequently she was in better humor than for some time, but when George came to take Dolly for a short ride, Delia's face blanched with anger, while she gave vent to a few pert words.

Dolly laughingly went to the buggy, and when she was seated George drew the lines and the horses swung round and went off rapidly.

Delia stood looking at them, and wished that the horses would run away, throw her out and kill her. "'Twould be sweet," she said aloud, as she turned to go in.

"What would be sweet, daughter?" said the mother, hearing the remark. "I thought you spoke to some one."

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"No; I was merely quoting a line I saw recently."

As they drove off, Dolly put her hand on his arm, looked up, asking sweetly: "Will you drive me by the Simpkins home?"

Turning the horses' heads in the direction, he assured her it was a pleasure.

She did not stay long.

"Her coming is like sunshine on a dreary, cloudy day," said Mrs. Simpkins to Mother Drewery, as they sat beside the bed.

As Dolly came out, she smilingly said: "Just one more request, and I will not trouble you further about my selfish pleasure. I want to see Aunt Betty so bad."

"Ah! that's the best of all, my darling! You shall see her at once."

Aunt Betty was sitting in her accustomed place, and as they drove up, she saw them.

"I knew you would come to me, my sweet child," she said, as Dolly ran up the steps and into the open arms of Aunt Betty.

The reverent expression of him, as he gazed lovingly on the two dearest to him on earth, was not mistaken.

Taking off his hat, he raised his eyes to heaven, and murmured:

"Oh! my precious, sainted mother, look down on the happiest moment since your loving eyes were closed forever to me. Angel mother, plead God's blessings on your lonely boy's happiness."

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A description of the day's pleasures were told, and how Old Mother so enjoyed herself that she really laughed out merrily, and what a soaking rain they took.

"Come with me, and try to get your breath," said he, placing one hand on Aunt Betty's chair, and the other in Dolly's. She was still talking cheerfully, assuring him that there was no danger of their losing their breath. He went straight to his room with them both, laughing at their expressions of surprise and wonder. As they entered, he said:

"I want to show you a precious beauty," he said, waving his hand in the direction, "see the reigning queen." They both spied, hanging on the wall, a life-size likeness of Dolly.

She could say nothing, her tongue clove to her mouth. She simply stood fixed to the spot, while her face spoke in eloquent, appreciative silence.

Aunt Betty threw up her hands in joyful surprise. She was profuse in her praises, saying: "How much more I would rather have the original."

George, clasping her (at aunt's side) in a tender, loving embrace, planted a kiss on her cheek, saying: "Aunty, pray God's richest blessings on our future love."

The solemnity of the occasion was touching. They stood for some time without a word. Then, starting the chair, with the other hand around Dolly's waist, he took Aunt Betty to

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her favored nook. They were too happy for words, reading in each other's features what they could not express in words.

The world was to the two lovers a magnificent storage from whose bounty they anticipated a liberal supply of sunshine and happiness.

Aunt Betty made no comments on their manifestations of devotion. They were just like all other sweethearts. It would be unnatural if they were not demonstrative, especially on the eve of their wedding day.

It was quite dark when George kissed Dolly good-by at the gate of her home, whence he had taken her.

She ran up the steps, right into Delia, who stood as if waiting for her.

"In the name of all humanity, Dolly, have you lost your senses? Why do you persist in this late time in getting home? I have so often warned you of the inevitable consequence. This is, you know, no place like what you are accustomed to," said Delia, her face crimson with anger and indignation, "to go gallanting around unaccompanied by an older person."

"A chaperon is not essential to my preservation," said Dolly.

"You are sadly wrong," snapped Delia. "I have more experience in a small village than you have. There is nothing more deplorable than to have your conduct spoken of by the mouths of the gossipers. In a place like this, your affairs are everybody's."

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Dolly was so agitated at the outbreak of Delia's displeasure, that it saddened and mortified her. She knew there was no impropriety in her conduct. George would have warned her, so she said apologetically: "I am sorry, indeed, Delia dear, to have so grieved you."

"It's your own imprudent self that you need to grieve over. You need not imagine me painfully concerned," she blurted. "Supper is ready and waiting."

"Oh! I am so sorry to have caused dear Mrs. Vining any worry. I will go to her," said Dolly, her voice quivering with grief.

She found her and explained the cause of her absence, and how supremely happy she was, mentioning discreetly the love she received from Aunt Betty.

Delia's hypocritical jealousy caused this innocent, unsuspecting, trusting friend a sincere pain. When she heard Dolly joyfully relating the blissful moments she had had at George's side, she could not control her anger, and, going up to her room, she gently and noiselessly opened the door and entered. After a short time, she went to Dolly's room and knocked at the door, and, upon entering, said:

"My dear, you are so good and sweet, that I know you will forgive my seeming harshness, when I tell you that my heart is bleeding over it, now, won't you, sweetest? With a glimpse of this," holding a letter up that she might see

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it, "now, kiss me, and say I will not think of it again."

Seeing the letter, Dolly at once recognized her father's handwriting, and clapping her hands joyfully, said: "Oh, it's from my papa."

The sight of the letter, and a question or two from Delia about her visit, Dolly's forgiving soul saw and poured out her overfilled cup of happiness to her pretended appreciative, sympathetic friend. Holding the letter up in her hand, she saw the writing of her father, and grew somewhat suspicious, but she was so filled with the joys of her future, that her heart felt that it must speak, quite unaware of the wounds inflicted to her friend.

"I thought you were so anxious about your letter," said Delia bluntly.

"Intensely delighted," she rattled on, as a child over a new and pleasing toy. Sitting a few moments longer, Delia rose quickly, and said: "You have recovered from the fatigue of the day. I am glad to see it, and hope you will be able to sleep well to-night. Good night."

"Are you going so early?"

"Yes, dearie; I will have you up early in the morning."

"I want you to stroll with me to a beautiful nook down under the hill, toward where Nina lives. Go to sleep early, so we may be up with the sun."

"All right; there is nothing I enjoy more than such strolls," and with this Delia closed the door.

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Dolly opened the letter she had received, reading and re-reading it, as she sat there dazed and petrified.

"Oh, God!" she moaned in her anguish, "save my precious mother until I can reach her."

"Oh, my sweet Miss Dolly! Are you in trouble? For mercy's sake, tell me what ails you."

The unexpected entrance of Nina broke the trance and brought her partially to her senses. She was not aware how long she had sat thus, nor was she aware of any one being near until she felt the embrace and heard the sweet voice of Nina close to her face. Looking up, she truly saw her own troubled expression reflected in Nina's. As they looked at each other, the beautiful, happy faces were transformed instantly.

She saw the open letter on the table, and, guessing the cause of Dolly's sad face, she forced a smile and opened the way to a change of subject.

"You have not said you were glad to see me, my dear. If you knew of the many duties I hurried through purposely to spend a few happy moments with you, my own sweet Dolly, you would at least smile and kiss me."

"My little Nina," said Dolly. "Of all my friends," throwing her arms around her, and drawing her down beside her on the lounge, "I know of no one whom I would be happier to see or love more. To know, precious, that you

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taxed yourself, and too, that God is not pleased with my happiness, and is determined to cover my rose with more than the usual number of thorns, that at every admiring glimpse I am sorely pricked, I am so glad you thought of me and came to-night. I have just received a letter from my father, saying come at once, mother is very, very low. Oh! Nina, I have always loved my God and served Him as faithfully as I could, but now, just when the world seems bright, and there is so much happiness in sight for me, I am doomed to this calamity."

Nina gathered her in her arms, kissed her repeatedly, and urged her not to plunge so readily and irresistibly into such fathomless depths. She pleaded "that there is always a ray of hope and light to cheer the weary traveler; that God was good and never placed a burden so heavy that we could not bear it. Mr. Sapp was kind enough to come with me, and asked that you, Miss Delia, and I join in a game of chess. Come, my dear one, let me bathe your burning eyes and aching head with my own hands, and you will feel so much relieved and fresher after you spend a short time with others."

"Oh, truly, I don't believe I can, dear Nina. Won't you say that I am not well."

"That you are going, is what I am saying. You are perfectly well, only a trifle moody, which will pass away in a very short time. I know you are sad over the news of your mother's illness, but, my own precious darling, don't

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let there be a sigh or shadow on your beautiful face this evening. Now, be a good girl, and obey one who truly loves you."

"Oh, Nina! Why do you speak so? I could never act the hypocrite."

"My dear, my mother has been sick; other mothers have been sick, just as yours. She will be better, just as others get better—His will, not ours, little darling."

"Now, you think me unsympathetic, but it's no such thing. This is for your good. You might get Mr. Sapp to deliver a word to George. He must know, and take you to the depot, don't you see?" gleefully clapping her hands and skipping around.

"Dear, dear, noble George! Of course he must know. I must say good-by to him. He will help me bear my trouble. The time is so short, too, when I shall be his proud, happy wife. I hope it will not be marred by any heavier clouds than I see this instant."

"Certainly not, dearie; we will not permit them. Hurry up, come," and together they crossed to the library, joining Mr. Sapp and Delia.

The ready wit of Nina, who, armed with the unmistakable intuition of woman, that some hideous, scowling, mocking demon hovered, vulture-like over this unsuspecting but strangely influenced susceptible young woman, fully disarmed her fears.

The time passed far more pleasantly than

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Dolly dared dream, and Delia, as she looked on her confiding, trusting friend, several times during the evening, felt a faint prick of remorse for the unremitting, burning hatred that had matured so rapidly that it was now a vivid, lurking light in her existence, and she inwardly hailed with delight the news of Dolly's mother's illness, and of Dolly's early departure, dreaming of the bliss that she would have by manoueuering kindness in comforting George for her absence. She was led on in her fiendish allusions to view herself happily transplanted in her friend's place, never doubting her ability to entirely eliminate every atom of his affection for her, once she was out of the way.

Thus deeply engrossed, the three chatted on, and, as Nina thought it was time for her to go, she said she would help Dolly make a few little preparations and say a few words of consolation.

They went to Dolly's room and left Delia just where she most desired—alone with her aid. As soon as they were alone, she began to expound, coax, threaten and dare Mr. Sapp. Nina did not stay as long as they desired, she having interrupted them, and they agreed to meet later at the usual place, under the vine, and concoct the doings of the coming day.

Nina promised Dolly on leaving that she would be again with her early the next morning, and begged her to go to sleep and be strong for the journey before her.

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Delia hurried to Dolly as soon as Nina had gone, and showered her pretended sympathy as freely as the sprinkles of April, busying herself much with packing Dolly's bags and trunk, and urging her to stay longer, if only to hear again from her mother. Dolly never doubted her friend's sincerity.

"Never mind, my dear one, it is only a few short weeks, then we will be so near that you can spend the most of your time with me."

"Oh, I know we will be so happy; don't you, dear? My George is so good—he will do everything for our mutual pleasure."

"Oh! Oh!" said Delia, clasping her hands to her bosom, and then rubbing her hand.

"Are you hurt, Delia?"

"Yes, I nearly mashed my finger badly," still rubbing it as though she really had hurt it.

"This is all you can do for me to-night."

"Then I will go and doctor my finger and let you go to sleep."

"Don't forget our walk in the morning."

"No, I will not," and, with this, Delia took her leave and Dolly dropped off to a peaceful sleep.

CHAPTER XV

As the house grew quiet, the stillness told Delia that she was safe. Throwing her black shawl over her form, she noiselessly stole out,

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and hurried to the designated place, finding, to her relief, that the men were both there, fast in the coil of her snare.

"Good evening, gentlemen; this is indeed a pleasure to find you both here."

"Well, hit's business what brought me here, miss, so the sooner you hit on your plans the better I will like it," growled Simpkins.

"Very well, Mr. Simpkins; but let's be a little more pleasant to each other, and speak more cautiously, as 'tis yet early, and there is lately a lot of passing to and fro. By the way, Mr. Sapp, how is the candidate's chances? Do you think Mr. Allwane will win? I hope he will," said she.

"That is a question yet to be settled. We all in this part of the woods are sure of winning, and, of course, the others are equally sure. Have you decided which of your plans you like best, miss?"

"No; that is the point I want both of you to help me settle."

"Well," said Simpkins, "where is there a place of safekeeping anywhere around here? Oh, pshaw! the idea of placing a victim in miles of this neighborhood would be nothing but absurd."

"And surely be pie for the detectives."

"Oh, oh!" shuddered Delia.

"The devil! You will 'oh, oh' louder than that afore this thing is over with," said Simpkins.

"I am not afraid," said she bravely.

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"That's it; you had best be brave," said Sapp. "I defy any set of men living."

"Yes, you both have been very successful in eluding suspicion so far," said Delia.

"Surely an innocent man has nothing to fear," said Mr. Sapp.

"Well, we will let that part of it rest at present. Time is flying, and we must hasten. Do you happen to know of an old couple in the most remote part of the settlement of the place called the Sixteenth Section, away off down on the river near the line?" said Delia. "I would rather risk her there."

"Oh, bully! Buncum!" said Mr. Sapp. "I know of a dandy place."

"Are you sure?" asked Delia, clasping both hands in her fiendish delight.

"Sure. I am as sure as I am that the devil will get his own."

"Whereabouts, Sapp do you mean—that old scoundrel that keeps the upper landing, where nothing but owls, bats, alligators, rattlesnakes and scorpions live? The boat goes down the river at what time?" said Mr. Simpkins.

"The schedule used to be Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, and it don't change once in a lifetime, so that is the finest part of the job. You will have to leave on the train that passes here about three o'clock, and seclude yourself at the best place, you being the judge of that," said Mr. Sapp.

"Which do you think will be the safer way to

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get to the place," said Delia, "by going down the river on the boat, or get a team to carry you?"

"On the boat," said Mr. Sapp. "It nearly always lands there in the night, and so few people get off you will have no trouble with prying eyes and busy tongues, which, in this case, are the evils you will most dread."

"You are a wise fool, Sapp. That is the straightest shot to detection that you could ever imagine," said Mr. Simpkins. "If that is your opinion, I'll be cussed if you can't count this dog out of the race."

"Well, what do you propose, or how would you manage?" asked Delia.

"I am not much at thinking ahead, miss; but this I do know, that to get a team——"

"Here, listen. I think the best thing is to leave that part of it to Mr. Simpkins," said Delia.

"That is perfectly agreeable with me," said Mr. Sapp.

"We are about ready to adjourn, aren't we?" said Mr. Sapp.

"I want a bit of information in regard to this business. Who is the president of this body and the business manager?" growled Mr. Simpkins. "I suppose one will answer for both."

"Mr. Sapp, I presume," said Delia.

"I am not competent to advise in this matter," said Sapp.

"I shall look to you, miss, for directions and money," said Mr. Simpkins. "I want to say a

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word or two to you, miss. I am a straight man and strictly business. You don't know much of me, madam, but you can trust old Simpkins, and anything I can do for you I will gladly do. I will do my work well, and I must be paid well, and no darned fool putting off; you hear, miss?" bending close to her, his harsh, hissing voice sending a shudder over her.

"Yes; I hope there will be no unpleasantness between any of us."

They parleyed a while longer, Mr. Simpkins getting the amount that was sufficient to satisfy his greed, and adding to his already well-filled volume the blackest and most heinous of crimes.

Off he went, Delia and Mr. Sapp standing some minutes longer.

"I hope you will have a successful suit," said Delia. "I know of no one she loves better than you, and that is a valued card in your hand."

"Do you mean that, Miss Delia?" asked Mr. Sapp eagerly. "I would give my life if I knew; do you think she does not care for George?"

"Oh, well—oh, certainly not! not as a sweet-heart," said she. "Surely he can't love every girl and marry but one. For God's sake, have I got another cross?" more to herself than to him.

"What did you say?"

"Oh, nothing," replied she crossly. "Remember, don't let anything but death keep my instructions from being carried out. Good night, Mr. Sapp."

"Pleasant dreams for you, Miss Delia."

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CHAPTER XVI.

The county of H—— had been in the throes of one of the most heated elections it had ever known. The issue was a branch court house. There was a division. This was the all-absorbing question, as it was discussed and agitated at the time. New officers also were a much-talked-of subject. There was a division, of course.

After long and careful scrutiny, weighing and observing, these men of the county of H—— met en masse, framed this vital plank for the issue and against it. This was made the question preëminent in the campaign for representative.

On the side for, Mr. George Allwane was nominated—a man though young in years, who had the shadows of time lowered early, and fate grim and exacting had urged, nay, forced, the varied experience of years on him. The surging billows of gilded temptation had often pointed the finger of scorn at his unyielding will. Now, in riper years, as he viewed the rugged past, how thankful he was of the strong will that now, in this flattering selection his fellow-men had honored him with in preference to those he considered more fitted for the office. It was very gratifying to George, and even though he had in

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every undertaking plunged untiringly to further the success, he had the interests of others to guard against the concocting, dissimulating machinery of age and a man well chosen to manipulate it. So popular was he, that the opposing side doubled their energy, neither sleeping night or day, but watched with the eye of an eagle their manouvers.

Judging their future success by their repeated successes of the past, they jeered and ridiculed the energy Mr. Allwane was exercising. Repeated slurs and sarcasms were wafted to the people of Allwanesville, and the voting territory, intimating that it would be more profitable if they would rake and clean their fence corners, back yards, and open their clogged, unkept streets and import a man competent to brush the cobwebs from their deluded brains, before they put up a fight for a branch court and jail.

To such remarks George asked his friends to make no reply, instead saying: "We are aware of their infirmities, and we are laboring diligently, not to enlarge their already well-filled cup of sorrow, but to point, by way of discussion, to the bearer, the many eminent advantages to himself, the enhanced value of personal property, the improvements and expansion of interests in general, together with divers winning points, and invariably the curious tale-monger would be wholly converted."

On they worked, with the shadow of doubt and defeat near enough to spur them untiringly

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forward. Mr. Allwane was inspiring, and encouraging in his bearing, congenial and kind to everyone. The strain caused a tell-tale expression that caused Aunt Betty alarm. As his horse was brought to the side gate, ready for the trip he contemplated, she had him push her chair to her accustomed place in the morning for the shade and cool air, and that she might watch him until he was out of sight, or see him as he turned the curve in the broad, densely shaded driveway far down the hill to the road.

"How long will you be gone to-day, my boy?" she asked, as she raised her face to receive the kiss he always planted, going or coming.

"I can't tell this time, aunty dear, as the nature of the trip is one that requires both patience and brain, and is wholly in the hands of another, so look for me when you see me, and pray don't be uneasy if I should not turn up just when you feel I should. Say, how would you like to have Nina come over for the day while I am away?"

"Why, bless your heart, of course, you can be sure; but wait, is she not teaching?"

"Yes, yes; I had forgotten that she can't leave; but how about Miss Vining? She will at least keep you awake talking."

"Oh, horrors!" said Aunt Betty, throwing up her hands. Sure she will have me strung on a vine before this sun sets. I would rather be alone."

"I am not just satisfied to leave you alone.

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Do let me have her come; perhaps she won't devour you wholly, until Nina can get here after her work."

"Well, if nothing else will do, you may have her come."

He drove by and told Delia, who was delighted to spend the day with Aunt Betty.

The man Mr. Allwane took with him was a man who could manage labor, so George told the curious gossip-mongers, and that he found his time so limited on account of his other duties that he was forced to have some reliable man to superintend his farms, and keep his hands contented and the work properly done. He was not a very promising looking man, but a few weeks would prove his worth.

As the two were leaving town, they passed Ralph Japin, who cried:

"Hey, Mr. George, where are you going—is there room for another?"

"I am going down to my lower farm. I suppose we may wedge you in if you make yourself small."

"This is one of the mysteries as yet absolutely void of a suspect," said Mr. Allwane, as they were earnestly and very minutely discussing the connecting incidents with any bearing on the subject.

"There will be a horse and buggy at your command, Mr. Crookshanks, and Mr. Japin may be of great value. I hope you will find means of entertainment."

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"Don't you allow yourself any doubt about my amusement. I will furnish fun enough, don't you fear. I'll bet my old hat that before a week I will scent my trail, and the birds ain't far; you know them."

"You have my hearty coöperation and service, if I can in any way help you."

"I know that, Mr. Allwane. I know that, sir; being in your service, I will drive up to-morrow, and you may introduce me to the officials of the mill; you understand?" said Mr. Crookshanks knowingly.

"Yes," said Mr. Allwane.

"And I will proceed to know others. Now, you just give me a few hints as to this business, and I will be a full-fledged overseer; isn't that what I am to be?"

"Yes, that's it," said George, laughing heartily.

Giving the desired information, he drove by another plantation, gathered some choice fruit, then hurried home.

Nina had been there some time, and, to Aunt Betty's anxious relief, Delia's heart and mind were partially relieved. The consuming, jealous curiosity knew no barrier. When Aunt Betty, after dinner, took her accustomed rest, she insisted that Delia rest in the spare room, a small, but daintily and beautifully furnished one, forming the connecting link between her room and George's. Delia was delighted at the opportunity, and gleefully whispered, "Now is your time." Assuring herself that her hostess was asleep, she

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made no noise, and, peeping through the keyhole and listening, she heard no sound or movement.

She tiptoed in her stocking feet across the room, turned the knob, softly opened the door, and slid in; listening for a sound, but hearing none, she drew a deep breath, while a moan, half aloud, escaped her.

"Oh, how lovely is his room—his own. My God, will it ever be mine?"

She picked up his tie that she saw him wear the day she drove with him, and pressed it to her lips. Opening the album from the table in the center of the room, she found his latest photo, and, snatching it, pressed it to her bosom, murmuring:

"Oh, if you only knew how blindly, passionately, selfishly I love you! Oh! I love you, my precious darling! You shall be mine. No other woman shall look into those lovely eyes and call them her own, as long as my life lasts." Still admiring his picture, she crossed the room and sat down in the reclining chair by the window. The blinds securely drawn she felt safe in this haven. A few moments more were spent here, pressing the likeness fondly to her lips, kissing it repeatedly, chanting endearing words.

"You will love me, dear, you will take me to your bosom in the near future, won't you, my own idol, and call me yours?" Oh, I hear these sweet lips now. Oh, a cricket moved." She raised her eyes and looked across the room. "How dare you? Who put you there? Ah, how

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freely I could tear you in shreds. Oh, my God! the devil sent me here to see you. Ah! my sweet-tongued, silly fool, you may gloat over your place, and tell me that your dear George would provide amusement for you and I. When you realize your dreams, it will be in some other land. Oh, I hate the sight of you!" Clinching her teeth, she sprang across the room, fighting the air. Frenzied, demon-like, she stood, with the veins of her temple swollen like cords, her eyes widely dilated and snapping furiously, her face purple and distorted, as she stood beneath the life-size likeness of Dolly, with her sweet, calm expression, the clear, large, searching eyes, the faint smile that played sweetly around her beautifully moulded lips, as she had seen them so many times, and it set her wild.

The sight sickened and maddened her treacherous, deceiving soul, and sent revenge and jealousy darting like a two-edged sword through her heart.

"That is what she was doing here—admiring her detestable self, which he had had hung where his eyes could rest on her at every turn. You sly pussy, beware, beware! My revenge shall be sure," shaking her finger in the mute, appealing face.

She turned to the table and placed the photo back.

"No, I will not leave you," she said, grabbing it up and thrusting it into her bosom. Listening, and hearing no sound, she slipped out of the

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room. Throwing her quivering, agitated frame across the bed, she gave vent to her pent-up, unhappy feelings. She lay thus for several minutes, when she heard Aunt Betty say to Hannah:

"Go bring her fresh water, and a glass of cold milk and a slice of bread and some of those sweet peach pickles."

She did not stir when Hannah came in, and allowed her to call and shake her twice. Opening her eyes, and feigning utter surprise, she raised quickly up.

"Ah, Hannah, what a jewel you are! This is enough to tempt the angels," she said, and then asked "if Aunt Betty was awake or up?"

"Yessum; she said she was waiting for you in the setting room."

Hannah made herself quite useful.

Musing to herself, she asked Hannah some things she wanted to know about Mr. Allwane.

Delia could not resist the opportunity to question her, now that the ice was broken by the unassuming ignorance of the servant.

A thrill of delight strengthened her consuming curiosity, and she proceeded to ply question after question. The color and ignorance was no standard by which Hannah could be judged. Blinded by her own thirst-quenching delusions, Delia failed to note the tempting, false replies, nor the knowing twinkle of the servant's eyes, as she busied herself in the capacity of maid. When Hannah was called by Aunt Betty

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to come to her, she was by far the wiser of the two, as she remarked to Aunt Betty later on that "dat 'oman is a snake in de grass," but would not commit herself further.

Delia joined Aunt Betty very soon, and they chatted very pleasantly for a while, then she indirectly and very discreetly attempted to satisfy her curiosity by a deceptive, well-meaning interest in her management of affairs, and how admirably she managed the interest of Mr. Allwane—wondering if she could ever submit to her a coveted care of the choice of the master.

Aunt Betty sat with her work in her lap, where it had dropped from her hands as she at once caught the object of flattery, and the first impulse was to denounce it.

"No," she thought; "I will find her object. It is not so well meaning as she pretends." She made some reply, asking her to play and sing some for her, that she was "so very fond of the old ballads, how much she loved to hear Dolly play them, her touch was so soft and sweet, how anxious she was that George should get through with this old election business and get married—how dear and sweet she was."

This was indeed a severe blow, and was driven where the dealing hand intended it should be. Anxious to drown her agitation and anger, Delia turned to the piano, and, with a nervous voice, sang the suggested song and with rallying vigor she played a lively, stirring air, throwing off successfully the disappointed feelings that were

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striving for possession of her depraved, burning heart.

Very soon Nina came in, warm and tired out, but her pure, bright disposition was like oil on troubled water.

The trend of conversation drifted to subjects of happiness, free from an undercurrent of malice and prying jealousy. The time passed by swiftly.

When they saw George coming up the broad walk, they shouted and ran to meet him. He saw them and started to run round the flower-beds, they after him. When he had got quite a distance from them, he stopped, and holding up the fruit temptingly to them, they begged:

"Oh, please! Oh! Isn't it lovely? Goodness, that's mean," said Nina. "I am starving for that beautiful large peach. I can taste those grapes."

"Catch me if you want them," said he, laughing heartily.

Away they ran after him. Teasing them a while, he ran around, got ahead of them and to Aunt Betty first, placing the basket in her lap, drawing up a chair and inviting them to join them. Seating himself at her side he pointed them to chairs at her other side. They laughed and joked together, all the while doing perfect justice to the basket.

Delia looked at the handsome face, brainy, moulded head, the keen-searching, deeply-set eyes that could see the very recesses of the inner soul, sympathetic when appealed to, expressing

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volumes when agitated in matters of thrilling interest to them. Her heart jumped in her throat, and a smile stole over her flushed face as she allowed the imaginary thought to rest momentarily in her mind of his love for her.

"Ah! Why can't I win him? I will! I will!" thought she. "I would be the happiest woman in all this wide, wide world."

"My mother thinks I must have run away," she said aloud.

"Why? 'Tisn't late," said he. "I will drive you home as quick as Ben gets up."

"If you care to go, it would be far more pleasant to walk. This is the grandest road at this time in the afternoon I ever saw in my life; and one passes so quickly in riding that you lose the beauty and grandeur of the scene."

"The pleasure is mine, either way. You are going to spend the night with aunty, aren't you, Nina?"

"Oh, I wish it were possible, but, as mother will be away to-night, I will join Miss Vining and yourself."

"Child, can't you come to-morrow; if not for the day, as long as you can. Miss Vining, when may I expect you again? I will be glad to have you again to-morrow, or at any time you may feel disposed. I am alone so very much of late, and your young faces and happy voices are a great pleasure to me."

"Aunt Betty, there is nothing that gives me more pleasure than to come to see you. If you

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wish it, I could spend an hour or two with you each day, reading, if you like it, or as you desire."

"That is generous, my dear Miss Vining, and I assure you highly appreciated," said George.

"By all three of us," chimed in Nina.

"Yes, child, I will be glad to have you just whenever you can come."

Delia's heart had not beat with more vivid anticipations in many a day. To be in his home, the opportunity of ministering to one whom he loved, the chances of moulding her impression, as her wiry, deceptive, loathesome character was capable of, on Aunt Betty, she gloried in the chance of impressing her good will toward others, while she pictured in her imaginary mind many charitable deeds. How many suffering and needy of the mill operators she had relieved, this and other deeds she had only to tell, believing the dissimulating mask would be thick enough to conceal the rotten, black, concocting, scheming heart she had. She contrived to happen there when she thought George would likely be at home.

When Nina reached home, she found Mr. Sapp waiting for her.

George went in and chatted a little while, saying, as he pressed her hand at the door: "Be careful, my little sister; know your heart thoroughly," and left her.

She had told him on their way home all that had passed between Mr. Sopp and herself; how

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he insisted that she consent to an early marriage and tour the West. George thought seriously of this, and when awake during the night, he could not get it out of his mind.

The day following he had the pleasure of presenting to the different people connected, directly or indirectly, with the mill, to Mr. Crookshank, and they were invited to dinner at the Vining home, and, as no manner of excuses were to be accepted, there was nothing to do but accept. The meal was enjoyed immensely, and as they came through the hall, Miss Vining was presented to Mr. Crookshank. The quick perception of the stranger, as he, unaware, scrutinized her closely, prompted him to a cultivation of her friendship. Mr. Japin noticed it, but said nothing. On their return to the mill, Mr. Crookshank asked permission to see the works, as he had never seen one so large as this before.

"Certainly, sir, certainly! Joe! Joe!"

"Very well, Mr. Vining, in just a minute."

Presently Mr. Simpkins was presented, and took great pleasure in showing him minutely everything. As the tour progressed, they became more friendly, and the pretended ignorance of Mr. Crookshank about the different departments, led to his being freely and gladly informed. Seeing signs of the fire, he was very much surprised, and he plied question after question, guarding discreetly the manner and tone of his voice. His questions were sufficiently

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convincing to produce an air of knowledge and authority, as he pushed his hat far back, and drew a deep breath between his lips. Briskly stepping around, with pointed finger, from place to place, he asked many questions as to how it had occurred.

"Yes, sir; that's the mystery of the whole business," said Simpkins, stamping his foot and stepping quickly up to him and pointing his finger in his face agitatedly. "Why, do you know, Mr. Crookleg—I believe that's your name, sir."

"No, it happened to be shanks instead of leg," said he, laughing heartily, somewhat confused.

"Well, as I said, why, sir, the thing happened right in the broad, open daylight; it beats the face of the devil, and some of the men at their work, some like myself at home getting their dinner. My stars, man, that was a terrible thing! My God! I was, as I told my wife, glad I was at home."

"You were frightened pretty badly, evidently. Everybody was, I suppose."

"My stars, man! the people went wild—crazy."

"You lived very close to the mill, I believe you told me?"

"Yes, yes," said he agitatedly. "You can see the house from here," stepping to a nearby window. "Yander it is; I had been sitting on the side porch when my wife called me to dinner. We hadn't been through eating but a short time

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when a loud explosion was heard, and, before you could think, scarcely, this whole roof was on fire. The work that was done here was enough to have saved a hundred lives, it seemed, and there has never been any clew, or a hint as to its origin."

"Do people think it accidental or the work of an incendiary?"

"Accidental, of course. Nobody was seen about here, and how could a man do a thing like that, with the eyes of everybody around on him?"

"It was a heavy loss, even if it was insured," said Mr. Crookshanks.

"Pshaw, these men didn't feel it. They have got worlds of money. Some say that their insurance policy had expired a day or two before the loss. I don't know myself. I'm a man that always has business of my own to keep me busy."

"That's just the opinion I had of you, Mr. Simpkins."

"I am a man who wishes every man well. I'll swear, I'd rather do a man a favor than harm him. That's the kind of a duck you find me."

"I believe you, sir; I believe you."

"How do you like these parts, Mr. Crookleg?"

"Ah! ah! now, there you go again—my name is Crookshanks, not Crookleg," said he. "Do get it right. I always did hate a crooked leg."

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Seeing the humor in his eyes, Mr. Simpkins joined in the jolly laughter. "I haven't been here long enough to form an opinion, but this I do know, if I could get work here, I would not stay much more in those dreary, lonely woods. On the quiet, my friend," stepping closer, and speaking in an undertone, "do you think you could get me a job here—light work, you know? I would have to learn, but I think I would like this work. You could try."

"They don't often turn a hand away."

"That makes me feel better; I am a poor man, and have to work for my living, so you see, I don't want to be out of work. I would not worry you for the world, but if I could get you to kinder speak for me, as they like you, I would stand a better chance, if you don't mind."

"My stars, no! As I said, I'd rather do a man a favor than not, if I could."

"Thank you, Mr. Simpkins; I will appreciate your kindness. You can let me know; I will be up here every day or two."

They walked out of the main building, and Mr. Crookshanks looked all around, as if surveying the surroundings, and said in a surprised tone:

"Well, by Jacobs! since I see, you had a perfect right to be scared out of your senses, old man," patting him familiarly on the shoulder.

"Come, I will show you this way."

"I believe I will digest what I have just seen,

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and let you show me further when I come in again."

"When do you think that will be?"

"Oh, most any time; perhaps to-morrow."

Thanking him profusely for his kindness and appreciated information, he shook hands with him, joining Mr. Allwane, who came from the office, where he and Mr. Vining had been discussing the campaign interest.

"How do you like the mill, or the machinery, rather?" said Mr. Allwane, laughing at the pretense.

"It's just like I told you. You may have my old hat if I haven't a clew."

"What do you mean? Not here?" said Mr. Allwane, his face pale with astonishment. He was astounded beyond utterance for a few moments. They walked on quite a distance without a word.

"I think I will get a job at the mill, Mr. Allwane."

Still surprised, the latter replied: "Do as you think best."

"I applied through my guide for a place. I must be nearer my work. I want you to report that I am not competent, and, no account, if you think best, and you could not use me. I will apply here then."

He asked no more questions. The subject drifted to other things. His nomination was discussed.

"The beyond holds bright stars for you, my

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friend. I can't see much. I assure you, sir," said George, "the goal is far and a bitter, stormy way, with pirates and treacherous quicksands yawning to devour a traveler before he is aware of it. Seeing from afar the steep incline, and ignorant of the snares that hedge the way about, I am forced to admit that only the services of a needy, deserving people is what will strengthen me on the journey. It's a pretty tough proposition, but they believe in you, Mr. Allwane."

"So I have reasons to believe; that is a priceless reward, for which I would willingly sacrifice the last drop of my life's blood, and consider the fight, with all its obstacles, a pleasing, willing service. Say," continued Mr. Allwane, "there is to be another joint debate to-morrow at a school-house known as the Forks. I wish you could go. Can't you?"

Thinking a few moments, Mr. Crookshanks said that he would.

When Mr. Allwane went, after supper, to a business meeting, Mr. Crookshanks spent a very pleasant and profitable evening with Miss Vining. He did not mention the mesh-like web that was being woven by him, visible only to the sparkling, dew-like perception of a schooled and keen observer.

As George and Mr. Crookshanks walked slowly homeward, Mr. Japin came up whistling.

"Why, where have you been, Ralph?" asked Mr. Allwane. "You seem happy, at least."

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"No, sir; all there is in life right now, I am anything but happy—only a thief and a liar is happy—and I'll be durned if I am either of those."

"Evidently you can't be judged by appearances, then?"

"Just right, friend George. I spent the afternoon with that poor little sick child of Joe Simpkins, so that Old Mother might get a little needed rest. I thought I'd stay on all night, but the child grew so restless and begged first for his Dolly and then for Old Mother, that I went after her. She made me promise that I would stay with Nina and Ben."

"That's where you are going?"

"Yes; I was as late as I could very well be, that I might miss that devil of a feller of Nina's."

"Who, Sapp?" asked Mr. Allwane.

"Who else would be fool enough to hang around and tease the natural life out of a girl? He is figuring on taking his leave right soon, if I can see a thing or two."

"Are you sure?"

"No, I'm not sure; I couldn't swear to it, but Ralph Japin ain't no fool. Hit's to be hoped that Nina will have better sense than to be overpersuaded. He was a-pleading and begging to-night to a 'Solo Finish.'" The men laughed.

"We will hope for the best, Ralph. We will see you to-morrow very early. By the way, Ralph, come take breakfast with me. Mr.

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Crookshanks and I are going to the Forks, and you may join us if you care to."

"Yes, sir; I will be glad to go. I'll be there on time."

Ralph got to Nina's home just after her admirer had done. She had emphatically and positively refused him any encouragement.

As he walked home, the twinkling stars, the half-hidden face of the smiling moon, as it drifted lazily under and out of the gathering clouds, had never shone on a man with a more clouded or complicated future.

The appearance of the man a second later, as he swung low the threatening hand, drawn ready to strike, brimming full of a blackened, hideous, mocking past. Melancholy and perplexed, he went to the designated place of meeting. Surely the demons in hell, weary of the obedience of their most faithful servants, and sickened with disgust at the gorge of the excessive royal festivities in all their heinous splendor, held him enthralled.

The scene of the three, as they sat close to each other, speaking in low tones, was diabolical and weird.

CHAPTER XVII.

"My God, if thou wilt not spare to me the last treasure I possess in this dreary world, oh, for pity's sake, let me go, too. Blessed God, I beseech thee to hear me."

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"Honey, you must not go on that way. There is a great work for you."

"Have mercy, oh, my Father! Oh! I can't stand it—I can't—I can't!"

As Old Mother stooped and tenderly raised the frantic mother, and started to the adjoining room with her, she looked up in her face with a confused terror shining from her dilated, burning eyes. She threw her arms around Old Mother's neck, saying:

"Oh, please let me stay with my darling; you can't say that he will be here long now. Oh, it would tear my heart from its weary place to leave him."

"My dear, if you stay here, you must promise that you will be quiet. He must be quiet. The doctor said he would be likely to last several hours."

With a resignation and a pallor that was frightful to see, she went straight to the bed, knelt, and took his hand in a loving grasp, and seemed lost to all else. A quiet reigned, save the lonely tick of the clock for some time, when a racket on the side back porch, as though some one was falling over chairs, was heard.

The mother did not notice it, and Old Mother sat perfectly still, waiting developments—a heavy fall and a deep groan with mumbled oath was heard; then quiet reigned again for a few moments.

"Mother, mother!" was heard. She paid no

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attention to the summons, and after waiting a while a scuffling sound was heard. "Why (hiccough), I say (hiccough), where in the d— (hiccough), where (hiccough), in the devil, is she?"

By this time Simpkins had scrambled to the door, holding on to the facing, by which he swung half in. His eyes were red and wild, his hair disheveled. Looking a moment in wonder, his wife seemingly unaware of his presence, he staggered toward the bed. Old Mother sprang up in front of him. He drew back and motioned to the two. She took him by the arm in a firm, positive manner, and said: "If there is a spark of love in you, or an atom of manhood left, come away and leave them alone," drawing him firmly away, she led him to the adjoining room, forced him in, and, as he looked up in her face in much astonishment, read in her eyes the meaning.

She motioned to him, and, without further resistance he followed and fell over across the bed. She put a pillow under his head, and walked out, locking him in. As she entered the sick room, the child, in its fevered delirium sprang up, and but for the presence of the mother he would have fallen on the floor.

Old Mother sprang quickly to him, and, taking him in her arms, worked long and almost despairingly ere she could detect signs of life. Finally she succeeded in getting a strenghthen-

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ing cordial in him, continuing the bathing and rubbing with camphor and cold water. He rested again.

As soon as day broke, she started to get Nina to stay with her, but met Ralph; sending him, she went back, and, on entering the door she heard a wild, piercing scream, and a knocking on the wall. She ran in to find the father frantic and on the verge of delirium tremens.

Sending a runner for a physician, she managed somehow to keep him in the room until aid came.

The grief-stricken mother still knelt in mute agony, her lips moving in silent prayer.

The doctor soon put the temporarily insane man to sleep, telling Old Mother, after making an examination of the little sufferer, that he could not last much longer.

Ralph urged Nina to hasten. He then went to Mr. Allwane's, as he had promised. While they were gathered at the breakfast-table, he told of the awful circumstances of this stricken family.

"It is not necessary that you go to-day, is it Ralph?" asked Aunt Betty.

"No, ma'am."

"Then be a good boy, and stay here, and you and I will try to aid them if possible." They all looked at Aunt Betty in surprised astonishment.

"I thought I was considered the child of the occasion, from aunty's tone," said Ralph, "but I

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think we will have to get our streaked candy, chewing gum and sugar plum to quiet the real baby, aunty."

"I am surprised at you," said George. "Don't you know that it is impossible for you to even think of it, to say nothing of the attempt?"

"I don't see why Ralph could not push my wheel chair."

"Oh, yes; certainly he could push it. The impossibility lies in you, my dear aunty. I cannot permit any such imprudence. I am sorry to cross your desire in the very least, but my day would be a very unpleasant one should you do it."

"I am truly sorry for poor Mrs. Simpkins. She is to be pitied."

"Yes, the grief for the child is enough, but that sort of a husband she has to contend with is worse than the plague of Pharaoh," Old Mother said. "He was as full as a goat last night. I want a favor of you, Mr. Allwane. I hope you won't refuse me, as you did your aunt."

"Under the same circumstances, I could do nothing else. I think aunty, as well as the rest, will agree that my refusal is, in this particular instance, proper. The ayes have it," he laughingly answered, turning to Mr. Crookshanks. "Speak, let's hear your wishes, and I'll swear to grant it, if possible, to the half of my kingdom," pointing to a fine pointer pup, sprawled full length on the porch in the morning sun.

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"I am afraid to express myself. With that tempting ransom in view, I much prefer a refusal. Since your time will be fully taken to-day, I think we will invite Miss Vining. I am in love with her already," winking at George, and laughing a peculiar, meaning laugh. He said nothing but meant much.

George walked quickly out whistling.

"By all means your wish is granted. You may drive over for her, while I give a few directions."

Delia was delighted. She was unusually careful, and repeatedly cautioned the maid as to her appearance. Viewing herself with the aid of a hand mirror, and stepping off a few steps, she seemed satisfied.

"Ah, you is purty 'nuf to ketch any feller, Miss Delia. You sho' is. Dat man is done tired waitin'."

"Now, does my lips look too red?"

"No'um," said she, looking closely. "No'um, you is butyful, you sho' is."

The flattery of her maid was an inspiration. With the exceedingly gratifying expectancy of his presence near her all day to lull the hungry yearning (if just temporarily), to feel her imaginary future bliss would be manna to her starving soul, and delicious nectar to her aching heart. As the fascinating pleasure ran through her mind, she momentarily forgot the wicked, terrifying scene that had forced an unwelcome audience in memory's reception hall recently,

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that caused her to shudder and start, and to walk, when preferably she would sit.

With a ringing laugh at the capers of the fresh and spirited horses as they started, she was thoroughly happy, and gave her attention graciously to Mr. Crookshanks.

In the first hours of the day, when Mr. Allwane was absent, she grew more reticent.

CHAPTER XVIII.

This gathering, being in the opposing portion of the county, there were several very prominent men from the cities of the state, and naturally there was an immense crowd of divers sort. The speaking began early and lasted late, and the interest on both sides was intense. The sarcasms were bitter and numerous from the previously victorious side. The others laughed with them, and the enthusiasm grew serious. They pointed the finger of jeer and ridicule in a joking way at the little cross-roads, away off in the woods, where nothing but bull-bats and screech-owls ever found habitation. The absurdity of a mere speck on the earth, a thing so very obscure as the little place on the road being so unimportant in their estimation.

"A fight! Look out! Run! Separate them!"

The crowd was somewhat scattered for a few

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minutes, the difficulty, not a serious one, growing out of the resentment of some of the unpleasant sayings of the speakers.

No harm was done in the fight other than a black eye and a bruised nose.

"Now, little ducklings, bob up your heads and quack your last," yelled a group of assured victorious ones, standing near the stand.

The speakers and sympathizers showed an air of superiority of a marked kind.

"Well done! We have covered the field, said all there is to say, sent you so far into oblivion that the lapse of ages will not redeem you. You will be so thoroughly convinced of the uselessness of another attempt that the idea will be scorned."

The first speaker was a large man, his average avoirdupois being never under two hundred and fifty. He was one of the campaign managers, a well-to-do citizen and the biggest taxpayer of the whole county of ———. He spoke somewhat broken and quick, with a deep, bass voice. He walked up the steps to the stand with a very grave air of importance, cautiously removed his hat, placed it securely near, and, looking slowly all around, said: "This is all the good hat I have in this world, and I was seeing if there were any others here just like mine. Things down my way are of such an inferior quality that these weak, frail bones of mine quake and tremble at the idea of being forced to face so intelligent, wide awake, unmistakably

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progressive an assemblage—one so efficient in its superior littleness, so hedged about by its own conceited dissimulation that for the last thirty years they have revolved in the very same old antediluvian ruts, so worn from continual sameness that the creaking of the wheels are heard far and wide. For that very reason, my friends is why we are kicking so hard to break the sameness." (Loud shouts of applause.)

He did not say very much, but it was very pointed and weighty on the whole.

The next man was one from the capital city—a very eloquent and learned man. His speech was long and very thoughtfully prepared—no hint of sarcasm or grating words, a stream of bright, inspiring, sunshiny thoughts, and again on the brink of a neglected sorrow, feebly feeling its way to a place of recognition, urged by the assurance that once they succeed in planting their plans and inspiring aims and ideals, that a bright light, set high on the hill of need, reaching a helping hand to all with a spark of ambition in their make-up, pulling from the valley of darkness an uncultivated soil, and pointing with the hand of intellect to the numerous opportunities awaiting to crown their every effort to ascend.

The boisterous spirit that was so marked in the hearers was now gone, and in its stead a quiet stillness reigned, and every eye was riveted, every ear wide open to catch every sound that

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fell from this fountain so generously pouring out to them a cordial of strength and beauty.

"This is an occasion bedecked with rich and nourishing food, with rare and beautiful advice and noble, inspiring sentiment," said Mr. Allwane, as he rose to make a few closing remarks. "I am exceedingly grateful for the manifold feasts that have been so bountifully spread to-day for our famished, shriveled brains to pour over and digest.

"Fertile, indeed, is the soil from which sprang the minute atoms, like embryo sparks of emancipation. The leaven was tiny, 'tis true, but, with time it has grown from a mere speck, nestled deep in the uncultivated, uncouth, obscure head of an angular, tall and freckled-faced orphan boy, plodding his weary way, with a worn tin pail hanging on his arm, to his daily labor, praying all the time for the guiding hand and strength of an all-wise and gracious God. Drawing the folds gradually back of the dark and heavy mantle of years, drawn and securely held down by the tyrannical, painfully dissimulating, selfishly charitable few, reaching far down in the bull-bat and screech-owl region, a greedy, long-fingered, empty hand, a hand branded in flaming, choking, flattering terms affecting sympathy, aid and justice in matters their own, but too small to demand their rights. Turning the mirror to your honorable view, calling your attention to a broad area of gorgeously timbered, fertile country, unbroken by hills or hollows,

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the fertile and bountiful yield, the verdant pasturage, the improvements regardless of the empty hand drawn back and filled to running over, the thrift and industry, the very band of oppression that had in the past so royally and sumptuously provided and enriched the seat of the submission and ignorance of so deserving a set. Pointing with scorn at the weaklings, gloating in their imaginary, continued, successful oppressions, notwithstanding the size, the very fact, gentlemen, staring you undisputedly, the unbounded energy, the inspiring unconquerable material that has lifted us unaided from the depths of injustice, housed by ignorance, disadvantage and incompetency, to the knowledge of self-preservation, urging us to ask for our own to be justly estimated. Our brazen audacity, securely based on the theory that this is a people of paying according to the service. With this in view, and that every spark of energy and vitality we possess will be consumed to burst the bands that now point a hand of ridicule at us. To sweep asunder the stigma that brands us a weakly, impudent, bat den, to show to the observing world that all great objects were once small, that David of old was a wee child alongside of Goliath, who was an infant in his mother's arms before he grew to gianthood and manhood, that ye are strong enough to walk, and in our phenomenal strides to mature giant-hood as we near the borders of your Garden of Eden. We will reach a helping hand and lend

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a healing balm to the reflected wounds, that the broad place in the road will rise regardless of the obstacles, a monument of inspiration to the weak and needy, sheltering and encouraging in the band of brotherly love the wayward a——”

“Yes, I know they will do just that very thing. That boy will do just what he says he will do, or turn the devil over!” yelled a man, standing a few paces away. “I’m with ’em, boys!” he yelled again. “Hurrah!” throwing up his hat.

This broke the silent spell that up to now had been profound. The crowd went wild, several avowing outright that they were on the Allwane side.

He was taken unaware by a crowd of admirers and carried through the audience in their arms.

After repeated appeals to let him down, he braced up, removed his hat, and bowed smilingly in return to the extremely demonstrative sympathizers, who were yelling, throwing up hats, handkerchiefs and umbrellas. The crowd was soon quieted. The rude phrases that emphasized some of their applause was embarrassing to him, and they loudly shouted:

“Go your route, old boy! We are with you! He’s on the right track! We will bring up the sides.”

He finally persuaded them to put him down. Again he thanked them graciously for their esteem and confidence, assuring them of an hon-

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orable and conscientious service, and joined the friends on the stand as the exercises closed.

As he neared the shade where Delia and Mr. Crookshank were seated, he glanced at them, and saw a bored, cynical smile playing over her mouth. As she saw him coming with his friends, her face brightened, she straightened from the tired, weary position to one of pleased expectancy, and introduced them. She was very liberal indeed in her praise of the day's pleasures, and assured them of the rare merits of their discourse. Turning, she faced the speaker who had so bitterly ridiculed those of her side, as she expressed it.

"I want you to come to our village and see how erroneous your address was, and how ridiculous you appear to me."

"If I claimed a state as home and admitted openly the existence of such a den of ignorant midgets and impertinent thieves, I would draw a line of distinction."

"Not in the face of such assertions."

"Condemn myself by being one of them, if only for a second."

"Understand, sir, that information from such a source is not considered."

"Why, ah—surely—really, Miss Vining."

"Stuff," snapped she, "I won't hear any of your apologies."

"Well, I say, you must hear me."

"I won't! I'll stop my ears first," said she.

"Really, Miss Vining, I had not the pleasure

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of knowing you when I made those assertions."

"I told you I would not hear you."

"But you have heard me, though."

The sudden sense of amazed, surprised wonder was broken at the turn the sudden, unexpected outburst had taken, the ease and humor visible in his reply stinging her, but she bit her lips and choked the coming outburst back, joining the group in a hearty laugh.

Delia was still more vexed to find this new acquaintance was to go home with them. But the plan was soon pleasantly, and, indeed, gratifyingly fixed in her mind, and by her mesmeric scheming, she placed the two visitors on the back seat, while she and Mr. Allwane took the front one. Her heart leaped for joy, and again her weary soul was animated. He was unusually confidential on their return, and her joy knew no bounds when he suggested that they get Nina and spend the evening together.

"Oh, certainly; that will be glorious." She did not wait for him to finish interpreting his intention.

She took the sentence and began the arrangement of the evening's amusement. He had noticed her preference to him recently. With the understanding of his love for Nina, other than flattering his manly vanity, he had not given her a second thought.

As they rode along, admiring the beautiful landscape, the two gentlemen in the rear seat

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were earnestly arguing on an interesting subject, while she was pouring into his ears all that the bonds of society and womanhood dared permit, and, seeing the sudden reverie he seemed wrapped in, she touched his arm.

"What are you thinking about? All of a sudden you have such a far-away, solemn expression for the last few——"

"I can't understand Dolly. Something must be seriously wrong. I can't hear a word from her. The last word she said to me was, 'I will let you hear from me every day,' but I have not had a line."

"You haven't?" said she, in a gloating, half-surprised tone, "and still I am not surprised either. If you could read the one I had from her a few hours since, you would not allow your honorable heart to be grieved."

"What? Have you heard from Dolly? Are you telling me the truth?"

"Yes," she laughed very unconcerned, "I can tell the truth without your unjointing my elbow," said she, looking in his face with a soft, sweet smile.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Delia. I was not aware of giving you pain. But pray, for Heaven's sake, tell me if she is well and not in trouble." His eager, pathological expression, as she opened her mouth to utter such a black, infamous lie, caused her to swallow and look away. Then she said, in a light, sarcastic tone:

"Certainly she is well, and not in the very

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least trouble; on the contrary, she is, I should judge, very happy, as she mentioned in her letter of the gay time she had with a new sweetheart she had met, and of a visit she expected to take very soon. She said she feared she would be sad over leaving Allwanesville, but she was forgetting it so fast that now it seldom ever occurred to her that she knew any one down here. So you see, my dear Mr. Allwane, how seriously we misplaced our——”

“Hush, woman! You surely are mistaken.” He dropped his head in his hand, and a deep, heavy groan escaped from him, his frame shaking convulsively. The agony of those few moments, when he closed the door of his heart to the world, was terrible, but Delia was very tender and careful in her apparent words of sympathy. In soft, pleading tones, she urged him not to let such insincerity rob him of a moment’s pleasure.

He raised his face to her, white as in death, his mouth firmly set, with resignation plainly written in his face. She started, threw her hands partially, and exclaimed:

“Oh, Mr. Allwane! how pale you look,” in a voice so victorious that the attention hitherto unnoticed of the others was called to him.

They looked at him.

“By Jove! Are you sick, frightened, or mad? Evidently something is wrong.”

“Nothing, except I felt a little sick, I suppose, a while ago.”

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"Can we do anything for you?" asked Mr. Crookshanks.

"Oh, no; thanks. I am all right now."

This changed the subject, they all laughing and talking of things in common, Delia making two or three efforts to monopolize his conversation, not being successful. She was as personal as he would permit, using all the knack she possessed, waiting, watching, every nerve and fiber taxed to get an opportunity of consoling him and supplanting, if possible, the love he had for Dolly. She was perplexed and chagrined to know just what effect the news would have on him, but, pleased, however, to see the calm and seemingly happy face, where pain and distress were plainly visible just a little while ago.

"There, I am glad we are home, notwithstanding the day's service and pleasure," said George, as they stopped at the Vining home.

"When shall I call for you, Miss Delia?" said he, as he handed her in the door.

"Oh, I shall be ready in about one hour and a half."

"Very well." As quick as he could dispose of his guest, he went, like a tired, sleepy child to its mother for sympathy and nourishment, to find the one in all the world who would feel as he felt, into whose loving heart he could pour his wounded and sorely grieved soul, and finding her already excited and very much stirred up over the news of the Simpkins family.

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He paused, after a few words, and Aunt Betty looked at him, and said:

"My child, what in the name of sense is the matter with you? I knew this terrible strain would tell on my boy," tenderly stroking his hair, as he laid his weary head in her lap. "Tell aunty, precious boy, what has so upset you."

"I think you are pretty well loaded, if you'll pardon the slang," said he, smiling at her.

"Hush, honey; that's nothing when my boy is worried."

"Aunty," said he seriously, "there is something wrong with Dolly—gravely wrong."

"George!" she cried, her mouth aghast, her hands thrown up, her eyes searching his inquisitively. "What do you mean? Oh, my Heavens, what is it, my poor darling? Hurry, child, tell me."

"Oh, aunty, you must control yourself. I do not know what, nor where the trouble is, or it may be that I have been deceived."

"In who? Not in her, I'll bet my head."

"I don't know. If reports are true, I am ridiculously so," and then he narrated all that Delia said about her and her friends here.

"Who told you that?" asked she.

"Delia. She said she had received a letter from Dolly, in which she made the statement."

Aunt Betty, with tears streaming down her wrinkled cheeks, straightened herself up in her chair, and with agitated emphasis, pointing her finger as if to carry her meaning straight, said:

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"I don't believe one single word. I know it's a falsehood. That does not sound one bit like Dolly. It is a lie, George. Now, there is no use chasing the old bad man around the stump; the news will have to come from some other source."

"That is some consolation, aunty dear. I thank you so much."

"Well, honey, don't let your heart be troubled over nothing."

"But there is something somewhere," said he, whirling around, and walking off, whistling. As he waved her a kiss, going down the steps, he turned and said he was going for the young ladies.

He went by the post office, hoping against hope that perhaps her mother was so very ill that she could not spare the time to write; but no, that could not be, no apology that he could offer for her would fit. There was at his heart a dreadful, dark, horrifying premonition that loomed high and bleak, urging him, he knew not where.

"My God! my God! This is killing me by inches," groaned he, as he walked away.

"Hey, Mr. Allwane!" He stopped, looked around, and saw Mr. Vining coming toward him. "What's the news?"

He quickly took off his hat, and brushed his hair back with his hand to hide the irritating frown of displeasure that played prominently over his distressed features. "I am proud, sir,

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to say that I am very much gratified. We are aware, however, of the hard work that is piled high before us. But, with all that, I am led to believe that if we continue untiringly success will surely be ours."

"I wish you could have been with us," said George, with an enthusiastic laugh. He narrated the day's proceedings with as much interest and enthusiasm as though his heart was light. Mr. Vining laughed heartily and long. They parted with the promise of Mr. Vining to spend an hour or so at the Allwane home with their other guests.

George went hurriedly on, and, nearing the stricken home, he saw Nina standing leaning wearily against a post, her head slightly inclined, her back to him, her face to the sunset, drinking deeply of the beauty and golden splendor of the setting sun. The soft mellow light streamed over her face, showing a deep, pathetic, meditative expression. A sigh escaped her as George softly slipped close unaware, grabbing her by her shoulders, saying softly and very low:

"Why so pensive, sister dear?"

"Oh, my!" she almost screamed. "You bad boy, you frightened me so that I trembled like a leaf. Oh, me, me! You bad, bad boy, and I was already so very nervous that I could scarcely be still."

"That is just why I am here, and precisely the reason I tried to scare you."

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"Tried to? Well, if you didn't, pray don't ever really scare me. I never will grow any more," said she, laughing a low, silvery laugh, that made him look down at her, thinking her really beautiful, affecting seriousness, looking closely at her face and hair.

"Pshaw, childie! You will never grow any more."

She stared at him a second, and then his meaning dawned on her.

"Well, George Allwane, you are undoubtedly possessed this afternoon. I never saw you so silly," she added, "especially, when so near the most heart-rending sight you have witnessed in a long, long time." She saw his face clearly for the first time. "There is something wrong with you, my big bud," she added, still watching him closely.

"I came for you, Nina, and am, or should be rather, in a desperate hurry. Do get your hat."

"But I can't."

"Yes, you must go; aunty sent me to bring you."

"Now, are you right sure you are not joking?" she laughingly said. "Then, if you are sure you are not joking, I will go."

He still failed to see the catch, but seeing the amused expression of her face, he stopped for an instant.

"Ah, pshaw! I see your trick. We are even now. Get your hat and come; I am late now."

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"Really," said she, hesitating, "I hate to leave now."

"It's for so short a time that you won't be needed."

"I will come with you."

"Aunty is so anxious that you come. I will speak to Mrs. Simpkins while you get your hat."

Going to the grief-stricken mother, he consoled her as much as he could. Her first words were of Dolly. She, too, was alarmed over not hearing from her. He managed to get away from her as quickly as possible, feeling as though he had heard his death sentence. He had partially thrown over in his jesting, jolly mood, the dread and gloom that hovered threateningly near.

After a few words with her mother, Nina joined George, and, going by for Delia, found her waiting, apparently as happy as a bird. She greeted Nina lovingly, and was very solicitous that they rest a while before they started, hesitating as long as she could find an excuse to. They started, and Delia was rewarded presently by the sudden appearance of Mr. Sapp. Unaware of any previous meeting, they were as pleased as the others were.

"May I ask where you folks are going, and if I may join you?" asked Mr. Sapp.

"Delighted to have you," said Nina, looking straight at him.

"They are going home with me," said George.

"Come, Mr. Allwane, you and I will lead the way," said Delia. "There is nothing under

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heaven that thrills me more, or fills my soul with the beauties of nature than does a stroll just at this time of the evening."

They were so late in getting there that Aunt Betty had grown agitated and nervous over the thought that Nina would not get there, or perhaps so late that the meal would have to be served without Nina's inspection and approval.

"Oh, my dear child! I am so anxious for you. Why did you keep me waiting? I have worried my already nervous self into a fever. Here is all this company, and I have been so anxious for fear Hannah could not do just as you thought best."

"There, there, aunty dear; you must be calm and very quiet now. You know that you should have no fears or anxiety in the least. I will show you. Ah! what a delightful breeze and comfortable resting place," she said, as she dropped down at the window.

"Aunty, aunty, what a blessed heaven this scene presents, in contrast to the one I have just passed through. Oh! Oh! my precious Lord, I do truly thank Thee for the blessing Thou hast given me. But I must not stop now," she said, putting her hand on the back of aunty's chair and pushing her, walking by her side, crushing the heavy weight that seemed well nigh to push her heart out, but speaking in a happy tone, realizing more forcibly the influence on all but the helpless one at her side.

As they came from the dining room, her hand

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on the chair, she turned back to answer something Ned asked her, and, while thus, she started the chair slowly, giving the final directions.

George came tip-toeing, motioning his hands to aunty. "Hush! s-s-s—hush-s-s-s!" The joke and laugh were on him, for, smilingly, she quickly turned aunty's chair. "Peep eye; look there, aunty," she said, pointing at him in the large mirror of the sideboard.

Ben yelled: "You sho' is got him dis time, missus!"

Aunty laughed heartily as Nina shook her finger at him.

"Ah, ha! Now, Mr. Smarty, surely you'll behave. If he acts like this all his days off, I think best to have the services of a guardian."

Supper was soon announced. The guests assembled in the parlor, Delia furnishing the music, and later joining in the games. The ladies soon tired of nothing but politics, and, unaware, took aunty on the colonnade.

Nina was not content long. Mr. Sapp was delighted to escort her home, at Delia's scheming suggestion. Of course, she appeared pleased, but a chill of horror stole over Nina as she rose, kissing aunty good-by, promising to come again on the morrow.

Delia soon made her excuses, pleading fatigue and some special correspondence to do, and said she must go, too.

"Have you heard from Dolly since she went home?" asked aunty.

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"Indeed, yes, ma'am; twice, I believe; you have also, surely, surely?"

"'Tis strange that we have not."

If a light could have flashed in her face just then, the ready conception of aunty would have been relieved to an extent. The dark frown and closely drawn lips would have revealed the anger and hatred she so closely concealed. She was off as quickly as she could arrange. She was enthusiastic on leaving her hostess in her praise of the treatment Nina had shown them.

"Surely it was of small importance," she said, "since you are so very fortunate in finding out her deceit. She evidently was most insincere, or she would act differently. I am not surprised in the least. However, I am grieved to have you two so annoyed. If possible, I will let you see the next letter I get. Still, I wrote her that I did not accept it as a compliment—the idea of forgetting her friends in Allwanesville so readily. Well! I suppose I am different from most people," said aunty. "I can't forget a friend so soon." "Neither can I, if they are inclined to accept, but when a contrary desire is hinted so plainly, I know of no other course," replied Delia.

"I wish I could have seen that letter," said aunty, half aloud, engrossed in serious musings.

Delia pretended she did not hear, and very amiably turned, smiling at George. He made no remark or comment, leading them to believe he had not heard them. As he joined Delia,

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waving his hand at aunty, he noted the displeasure on her face.

"Call Hannah before you go, my boy. She will not know that you are gone, and will wait perhaps too long to come."

The light of a mellow, silvery moon smiled kindly on them as they walked leisurely home. Delia was so elated in her imaginary success in winning the treasure for which her fiendish, blackened, depraved heart had so cruelly and mercilessly dragged down its obstacle, and thrown it quivering from her temporary path with all the brazen, jubilant happiness her unprincipled, utterly heartless nature could feel. She was happy.

As they parted at the door, she heard the signal of the waiting ones. Saying a few last affectionate words before he left her for the night, she made herself as interested and loving as was possible in his care of his precious self in this trying and strenuous campaign.

Oh, how grieved she was for fear he was taxing himself beyond his strength.

"You evidently consider me a mere child—if you measure me by the meaning of your expression. I assure you that I am as careful of my very frail and delicate self as a master is of his serviceable, burden-bearing draught animal in a case of emergency," said he, rather irritably.

She laughed heartily at his comparison; again she heard the signal. But, to tear herself away from her love, from her wakeful, long-

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ing, scheming, harassing, anxious exertion, though sweet, was agonizing, and she thought of how, where and when she might be near him, to have him smile down on her with those wondrously expressive, lovely eyes. Her midnight, sweet and only dreams were of the castles she had built, of the exquisite pleasure and supreme happiness when she would have him all her very own.

She stood watching him from the half-closed door for several minutes, turning abruptly and closing the door. She uttered a low moan of anguish, and, with clinched teeth, she murmured: "I will have him! The angels of hades shall fall before I give him up. He shall be mine! He shall! He shall!"

George hurried home, and, finding his guests still arguing their respective views, he stole in to peep, and found Aunt Betty was apparently resting. He went back, joining the men, too greatly absorbed to take a very active interest in their discussion.

"I must know more fully before I censure her. Oh! my God! surely there is something dreadfully wrong," he thought.

Finally the conversation ceased, and the party dispersed.

Nina was so excited and nervous when she reached the Simpkins home, that she hurried through the house out into the back yard, where stood a huge shade tree under whose protecting boughs the well stood.

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She stood there, in the cool embrace of the air, with a basin of water to bathe her face in, and tried to calm her aching brain and prepare herself for the inevitable ordeal.

"Truly, oh, Lord, Thou art with me, or else the tempting demons would conquer. Dear Lord, I do not love this man I find, when I turn the searchlight on my heart. What is it that so strangely holds me toward him? Why don't I tell him at once not to ever mention that dreadfully annoying subject in my presence again? Why can't I send him from me without the pang of a loss? Oh, Father, save me from my weak self," she moaned.

Her reverie was broken by the sudden shriek and scream of the saddened mother, as she knelt by the bedside of her darling continuously, but for a few short moments, and watched his precious little suffering soul depart. He aroused from the stupor he had fallen into, and, looking up, smiling faintly at her, he primped his thin little lips for the kiss she placed, and said in a weak voice:

"Mamma, I hate to leave you. I know you will be lonely without your baby, but you must not cry for me, mamma. I am going to beg Jesus to send the angels to beg papa to be good."

"Oh, my darling baby! Don't leave me; go to sleep, and you will be better again. Oh, you wring my heart, my only comfort. Oh! I will be lonely. I can't spare you. I can't, I can't!" She pressed him closely to her bosom, covering

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his face with kisses. Reaching up to the table, she poured out a stimulating dose, and, with great difficulty, he finally swallowed it, saying, as she smoothed the pillow and laid him down:

"Sing me that sweet little song, and I'll try to rest." Glancing up, he held his hand out feebly to Old Mother, who was standing beside the bed, opposite the mother.

"I love you. You are so good. I don't want you to let mamma cry for me. Good-by."

It was a painful task he imposed. She felt that she would choke, but as he looked up at her and said: "Sing, mother, about His jewels; I will soon be with Him. Don't you hear that sweet music? Ah, it's all so lovely. Can't you see?" His eyes were steadily looking up as he spoke. She steadied her voice all she possibly could, and sang a verse or two of the sweet song.

He closed his eyes, and said: "'Bye, mother," and was with the angels in paradise.

The mother's screams broke Nina's reverie. She wrung her hands and wailed piteously, pleading, caressing, kissing, and begging him to speak again. "Oh! only once, just once. Oh! my little baby, look at your lonely mudder! Oh, come back to my empty, lonely, aching arms." Her voice changed from a terrible, heart-rending wail to one of fond mother pathos, as she still knelt, patting, smoothing, kissing and talking hysterically, as a mother talks love to her darling. Her face was like marble, her form

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trembling like an aspen leaf, her eyes widely dilated, speaking as rapidly as she could.

Old Mother put his sweet, gentle hand in their lasting resting position.

At each effort the mother's hands were busy, fondling, turning the still, lifeless face to hers, resting her face on it, murmuring precious words of love.

They saw standing near, the father, his arms folded on his broad chest, his face pale and drawn, his eyes those of a madman. He stood with his eyes riveted on the form of his lifeless child, like a statue, for several minutes, then, taking a step, and drawing back again and stopped again, his hands fell to his side, his head dropped and he reeled.

Ralph caught at him, but he recovered and steadied himself. His wife seemed to recognize him, screamed, and raised her arm.

"Oh, my baby! Look, father, look! He will send the angels to say good-by to you. Oh, Joe!" She had raised up, and, looking down on the corpse, put out her hands to him.

"Oh, my darling, angel baby, come to your mudder." Tottering, he caught her in his arms, kissing her wan cheek. A loud groan escaped him. Looking at Old Mother, who was weeping bitterly, he said: "Quick, a stimulant; quick," and, bearing her to the adjoining room, placed her on the bed.

Long and untiringly they worked ere the life that was so near its brink was visible. As Old

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Mother stood by the body later on, speaking in coaxing tones to the enraged father, he sullenly replied, with the hint of an oath, "that God was an infamous thief," and how utterly he loathed the very sound of the name.

"Man, oh, man, for mercy's sake, hush! I can't, I will not hear such. I will not have my God's precious name so vilely used."

"If you don't want to hear such, then please never mention the subject in my presence again."

She recoiled from him, his dark, convulsive expression was fearful, indeed, to behold. He whirled around as if to go away, when suddenly he turned to her, and, with surprising pathos, he looked her intently in the eyes, and said: "Old Mother, my love, respect and life-long gratitude is sincerely yours. But for your kindness, I don't know what my poor, little heart-broken wife would have done. Remember, I am at your service forever."

"Thank you, my dear sir; what I have done was a sweet pleasure to me, and oh, sir, if I can be of service to you, command me. Oh, for the love you bear that precious little lifeless form, look to Jesus and meet your darling in heaven."

He scowled and mumbled something as he turned abruptly away. The first-light messengers of another new day shone on the stricken home before the mother roused herself. She looked around with a searching, inquisitive expression. Nina, who had been sitting silently

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near, touched her arm, speaking of the glories of the new-dawned day. She rose quickly and exclaimed:

"My precious child, how did he rest? Does he seem better? Oh, darling! Mother did not intend to leave you so long."

She looked into the room, regardless of Nina's protestations. She stood with a fixed stare, as if to think, and, walking swiftly to the bed, she jerked the spread.

She looked vacantly at the door, attracted by the sound of footsteps. Her hands fell limp at her sides, as she gazed a moment, then screamed, "Father!" and fell senseless across the body of her dead darling.

A medium-sized, well-dressed, white-haired gentleman stood unannounced in the door of this humble home. As she screamed and fell, he dropped the traveling bag that he held in his hand. Making one bound, he was at her side.

Nina, amazed, astounded, stood aghast. He, seeing her expression, said: "Pardon me, madam, but doesn't the lady need attention?" His kindly voice somewhat aroused her, and she quickly answered: "I will call my mother, who knows better than I."

Old Mother was instantly there, not noticing but that this was the doctor, began to apply a stimulating lotion prepared for the purpose, saying, as if speaking her thoughts aloud:

"Poor, dear heart. Oh, honey, how Old

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Mother wishes she could ease that poor breaking heart. Poor thing, it's a wonder that she ain't dead. If trouble will kill, this poor lamb would have been dead long ago. She has prayed so earnestly and often, I think if she don't change pretty quick, she will have her prayers answered."

"Has she no husband?"

Old Mother, attracted by the strange voice, looked quickly up. Her amazement was equal to Nina's. "I thought you were the doctor the whole blessed time. Yes, sir, she has a husband, but she would be better off if she didn't."

"Don't you think, madam, that she needs the aid of a physician? Is there any one who we could send for one?"

"Certainly."

The doctor was soon there.

They placed her on a bed, after making a close examination. The doctor shook his head gravely, looking over his glasses. He said: "She might, with close nursing and careful attention, recover."

Walking from the room, he met the stranger.

"I am their physician, sir—Doctor Stransin."

"I am the grieved father of the suffering woman."

"What!" exclaimed the doctor, looking him closely over. "Surely, surely! you have not known of her condition. If there is not some very attentive and skillful care given, the delicate, frail flower will ere long droop."

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The father hung his head, and a deep sigh escaped his rigidly set lips.

"Where is the husband? Does he not provide for her? Is he unkind to my child? Say, doctor, tell me," said he, stepping close to him and grabbing him by the shoulder, looking up anxiously into his face.

The doctor gathered from the agitated and intense expression that it would not be advisable to tell the old gentleman the true state of affairs. "Oh, no! You misunderstand me, sir; no, no, not that. 'Tis true, I believe, that he does occasionally drink a little to an excess, but he holds his job. Poor fellow, he has had a hard time with his family. This is the third or fourth child they have lost."

The father made no reply, hanging his head. He started walking up and down the room, heeding no one, his lips firmly set, his face as white as the snowy locks that covered it, his hands clasped behind him. He kept up this slow, harassing monotone of the muffled sound as though his very life's blood was being sapped from him, drop by drop.

"Oh, my blessed Lord, save me from this distressing scene," silently moaned Nina. "If I have to stand this much longer, I shall certainly go wild. The mother's life hanging in the balance, insensible, her unconscious wailing, first fondling with her precious baby, next begging God to save her baby, how she missed her baby boy, then, oh, Joe, don't, don't. Again, oh, Father,

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if you only knew how I love you, how I long to see you, dear Lord, if you take him, let me go, too."

The continued tramp of the bowed father's steps, the cold, lifeless form of the child, the absence of the dissipated, depraved father, was appalling enough in its horrifying effect to astound and sicken the most heroic.

The depression was fast mastering the assumed strength left Nina and her ministering mother, and when the time for the burial service arrived, the two mourners were as widely contrasted as could possibly be.

One, though troubled sadly, sat erect, his features pathetically fixed; the other, head bowed, his dark, stony face, partially hidden, twitching convulsively. As the silent little form was lowered into its last resting-place, a loud, piercing groan escaped him, and he shook from head to foot, his face was set, his head lowered; then he pushed his way through the gathering, and started away, and, as he neared the main street, he passed a group of men earnestly conversing. One stepped beside him, saying:

"Mr. Simpkins, you are under arrest. This is painful, but as an officer, I must discharge my duty."

He did not reply, but kept on, his head lowered. Touching him kindly on the shoulder, the same command was repeated. He jerked his arm free at the touch.

"Oh, hell! Tend to your own business."

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The other, however, caught him firmly by the arm. Simpkins looked up with a scowl, ready to land a blow on his annoyer.

"What—ah! who!—who are you, and what in the devil do you mean?"

"I repeat, that you are under arrest for the crime of destroying the mill property of the Vining Land and Lumber Company."

"It's a lie—as black as hell! Let me go, I say!" but the iron grasp of the officer was secure.

The news spread like wildfire. The sympathetic mourners of a short while ago hurried on to be excited inquisitive accusers.

CHAPTER XIX.

"I told you as plain as the nose on your face," snapped the old woman, "when you took that afflicted critter here, that that scoundrel was gist a-wantin' to git rid o' her."

"Oh, shut up your cussed growlin'; I never seed sich a womun in my hul life as you be, an' old Jake Stephens has seen a lots of 'em afore you. I tole you if she gits to cuttin' up, jest you take that air rope and tie her and let her git her spell uv hollerin' out, jest so you keep an eye on the roads, an' if you see somun a-comin' you jest as quick as a cat can wink his eye, you wet this yere rag what he said, an' hold it to her nose till she drops her cuttin' up and bees

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still. I won't be gone long, an' if she goes to talkin' an' walkin' roun', you be keerful, them crazy wile cats are worse an' a painterer, an'll jump on you. When you don't think they is a-thinkin' about sich a wrong." He lit his pipe, repeating this very urgent precaution to his wife, saying in a rather coaxing and apologetical tone, as he gathered up the articles he was to carry with him. His constant companion for many years was his gun.

"I reckon that man will shor' he here to-night. He hain't paid me all of the money he promised the first time. He said the gal's folks had plenty uv it, and he would bring a round hundred the next time. Hoop-ee, that's a ding-bustin' good pile; that's a heap mor'n whut he put in my paw the night he brung her," said the old man, frisking around, filled with anticipated enthusiasm at the possession of such a fabulous sum. He said:

"Dog-gone my six bits! Ole 'oman, I won't give a d—m how soon anuther crack-brain gal goes crazy, 'cause she don't know how to spruce up an' show off dem finery or her feller gives her de high ball and skips the country, or—oh, well, 'tain't as I'm a-caring whut makes 'em loose they sense, if dey will bring dem here."

"Oh, pshaw! What in the name of peace ails you, ole man? I do believe you would strangle the poor thing to death an' throw her in de river yander jest fur a few dollars."

"Ah, ha, ha!" chuckled the villainous-hearted

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man, tipping to the closed door of the room that held the prostrated form. "Ah, ha! By golly, ole gal, you find ole Jake Stephen ain't a-livin' in a house what such as you can kick and squall down," with an air of pride, and a mean, victorious twinkle in his eye, his unsightly, unkempt beard, smoked and dingy, several inches long, covering his face. He peeped through a crack in the door, and, seeing her lying on a dingy shackle of rickety, makeshift for a bedstead, with a thin mattress, which served as the receptacle of sleep and rest for their prisoner.

Rising from his place of inspection, and going back to the bundle, he braced himself up, crammed both hands deep in his pockets, with a presumptive, superior, brazen air, said:

"I think she'll be quiet 'till I can go to the landing and back; I won't be gone but a few minutes."

The dense growth of trees, medium and tall graceful ones, with long, drooping branches in soft swaying motion, as the creeping, crawling things with eyes that glittered and sparkled from its dark and dreary place of hiding, of the prowling, barking and moaning, answered by the strange, weird, blood-curdling "hoo-a—ho—ho—hooo—ah hoa ho ho" sealed high in the strong moss hanging boughs of the huge giant-like fathers of the swamp, keeping guard over the vine-clinging branches, in whose embrace the blating bats, the loathing, repulsive, shivering screech-owls keep up a mournful, terrifying

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requiem to the whining, groaning, growling sound, so fearfully close that the hearer stood with bated breath, eyes expectantly alert.

Dolly's pale, wan face twitched, the dread and fear that fixed her as a martyred statue, as she was roughly thrust, with an oath, into this isolated, wild, jungle-like, uninhabited spot, and, save for one, depraved, uncouth, thoroughly steeped in his savage nature, and altogether adapted for this hidden, secluded section of the state, was the only human being she saw. The winding serpent-like Chattahoochee, noiselessly wound its silent way lazily on to the great Atlantic, undisturbed save by the semi-weekly passage of the steamer that transported alike the human and mercantile freight from points designated, were very rare indeed, with seldom an occasion for a stop at this port.

Unmolested and quiet in the extreme were the lives of this obscure human being and his wife. Happy in the security of this isolation, unharassed by the thought of prying eyes. No fear that the crime and sin would be penetrated, or that the mere shadow of a hint could be traced to their secluded nook.

Great was his definite, desecrating boastings of his seclusion, and many were the lawless, desperate escaped criminals whose deed and whereabouts have found a haven of refuge in this primeval, densely walled Sixteenth Section.

As the door slammed and the harsh sound of footsteps were heard no more, Dolly raised her

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scorching, hot, dizzy head on her elbow. A vague sense of numb, throbbing sensation, and a strange, terrifying thought came over her.

"Where am I? Oh, me! Oh, my God, where am I?" Trying to raise herself, she found her feet securely bound to the so-called rude bed. "Help!" she cried as loud as her weakened voice would allow. "Oh, for mercy's sake, won't some one come and help me?"

"Oh, shut you mouf, gal."

"Do, please, ma'am, won't you turn me loose."

"No, I shan't; an' I don't want none uv' yourse cuttin' up here, neither."

"But, my dear woman, won't you please tell me where I am, and what I am here for?"

"'Tain't no use to tell a crazy gal nothin'. You wouldn't know whut I was a-talking about."

"Oh, do please, I beg of you, to loosen my feet. No harm could come to you for that little kindness."

"That's jest like a crazy fool, like I wud have that little sense. Why, gal, you wud have my little dab of hair out by the roots afore I cud knock you loose."

"My dear woman, do you really think me crazy?"

"No, by the holy smoke, I don't think—I sure kno' you aire."

"Oh, no, no, no!" said she piteously, "I am not crazy."

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"Aw, ha! I never seed one yit that wus, to let them tell it."

"I am so thirsty—so thirsty."

"Aw, the dickens! Hush that biggity way you've got a-cussin me; mind, my gal, if you git too big aroun' here, youse'll git a dose uv that," pointing angrily at a large bottle labeled "Chloroform," she had just sit on a narrow board nailed near the little hole of a window in one side of the rough round log wall.

"Oh! my blessed God! What does this mean? Will you give me some fresh water to drink, if you please, ma'am?"

"There's your water, if that's whut yourse a-wantin'," said the woman in an irritated manner, pointing to a large, black, greasy gourd sitting on a three-legged stool.

"Thank you, ma'am; I am starving for some cool water." Her fevered thirst was so great that the water was sweet to her as the pure, sparkling water fresh from the crystal fountain.

As she put the gourd down, she said: "Thank you, so much. Oh, I do feel so fearfully bad; my head aches. Are we near a doctor?"

"What in the deuce aire you gwin' on about?"

"Won't you be good enough to tell me where I am?"

"Yes, I ken, an' that purty quick; you is whar you will be shore to stay a siege, I'll tell you; so shut your mouf, now, and stop your howling gab," said the old woman, closely watching Dolly from the corner of her squinted eye with a ma-

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licious, contemptible expression, as she stood looking down on the wan, frail, pure, helpless victim, her arms kimboed on her massive hips.

"You look like a kind-hearted woman," said Dolly, "and I know that you are, from the kind expression on your face. Won't you do me the kindness of putting a wet cloth on my head?"

"Ah! ha, ha!" laughed she, throwing back her head defiantly. "You air foolish, gal; do you think I would git nigh you—shore you air a snake in the grass, or a wile cat, to try to fool me, an' git me nigh 'nuf fur you to claw my eyes out; no, sirree; you sho' don't. Yore hed'll hurt woser an' hit do, if you don't shut your palaverin'."

The hideous, sickening truth was just dawning on her. "Oh, Lord, have mercy on me," she moaned, as she threw her arm across her eyes to shut out the horrors. She did not heed the presence of her heartless, loathsome jailer, but in vain she tried to think. The last thing she could remember was getting off the cars at the junction of the two railroads.

At the station she had to wait about two hours and had to get her baggage transferred, and walked leisurely around admiring the various points of interest. She was the only lady to wait for this train, and after the excitement of the arrival was over, the people dispersed, leaving only the employes, who were busy with their respective work. After she had attended to the

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duties of the change and strolled around the depot, she was attracted to the park adjoining. There was a number of large, inviting shade trees, with restful seats. She went to the most secluded nook of the grounds and began to read. Finding her mind would not leave her lover, and the sweet, consoling words as he kissed her good-by on the car, she wiped the tears that forced their way down her saddened cheeks, while she sighed deeply and said aloud to herself:

"Why didn't you come with me, George? Oh, my darling, this lonely hour would have been a few moments of supreme happiness and bliss with you to speak to and look down on me from those glorious eyes."

As she spoke, she threw her head back, resting it on the back of the seat, with her eyes closed, her hands folded carelessly over the book in her lap. She felt a firm grasp on her shoulders. She tried to scream, and then all was darkness.

The villain hurried the limp form off through the rear of the park unnoticed, into a waiting vehicle, and, jumping hurriedly in, he whipped up the horses, and very soon was out of the sight of the village and steadily going their weary way to the isolated, secluded den.

The night was dark; no silvery moon showed its smiling face to brighten the dark way, and it was with trying difficulty that he found the way, and with an occasional appliance of the

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deadening fluid, he had little difficulty in keeping his victim in submission, and when he had made a final disposition of his burden and shoved her rudely in the shack, and dragged her to the scaffold of a bed, cautioning, with frequent oaths the necessity of keeping her bound; that she was dangerous in the extreme, especially when she was aroused; said that she would cry and try to get their sympathy, saying she was not crazy.

The old man and his wife nodded assent to all his sayings, enthusiastically replying:

"We shore shàn't let her have no way to git away, you can bet your life on it. By jinks, Ole Stephens'll freeze to her till the last owl hoots—as long as there's any spondulicks comin' my way," said he, chuckling with a satisfied air, looking up in his face.

"Pshaw! there's barrels of that stuff, and if this is done up brown, see," holding a few bills and a hand full of nickels and dimes temptingly before the old man, arousing in his cruel, treacherous heart the satisfying consciousness of a greedy, avaricious desire. As he pranced around, assuring this benefactor of the rigid obedience of his instructions and desire, and putting special emphasis on the fear of her talking, saying that she was one of the kind that was always saying something, and that her affliction was brought about by the betrayal of her lover, and that she had spells of praying and begging God to help her.

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"Ha, ha! I'll be the God that'll help her," said the old man.

After a few more hasty instructions, he promised to be back, on a certain night, and, turning the tired animals toward the main road, he dropped a few extra coins in the old man's hand, and was gone.

The time was short for him to drive the long distance he had to cover in order that he might catch the train and get back home and not be missed from his work.

CHAPTER XX.

The train arrived at Dolly's home just as the light streaks in the east were faintly visible. As the cars rolled off from the depot of Dolly's home town and the coachman waited a few moments for her to appear, he got out and looked anxiously in the waiting rooms, then in the baggage room, saying: "I know she ain't here; she wouldn't think of such a thing, she is too proud to do such a thing, as long as I is here to tend to such. Well, I wonder what is the matter? I don't see her. She knew the carriage would be waiting for her. She has never waited so long before to come straight to the carriage. She knows I has a certain place to stand mine, 'cause I wants everybody to see what a fine turnout I drives."

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He was speaking his thoughts aloud, still waiting, looking disappointed, and still lingering, as if expecting her to come in sight.

"I do hate to go home without her; her ma will nigh cry her eyes out, she will be so scared about her. Poor missus, if she has much to worry her, she won't be for dis troublesome worl' much longer, poor thing."

Looking all around, he got in, clucked "git up, and let's go back without her," said he sadly.

Dolly was the petted darling of parents that were blessed with "this world's goods." Her father was much the mother's senior. He had a year or so ago retired from active business, consequently the three were thrown together more than they would otherwise be, and the sweet, happy serenity of their devotion was an influential benediction to the friends and associates, and when the empty carriage rolled past the main entrance, the father was dealt a blow of disappointment that the mother, who was confined to her bed, read in the saddened, anxious face that he tried hard to shield from her.

"She will be here on the next train, mother," was his apologetical assurance, as he went to break the news to her. "She was delayed by some unavoidable cause, I know, and will be here safely before many hours."

"Do you really feel sure, father?" said she, as she closed her eyes to hide the fast-gathering tears. "Somehow I feel that our darling is in

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trouble; if she does not come or let us hear from her very soon, you must write to her friend."

"Mother, mother, don't allow yourself to dwell on any unpleasant thoughts; rest assured, my dear, that were there anything of an alarming nature, we would have heard it; she is well. My dear, if you persist in this exciting imaginary trouble, you will cause us both suffering," said he, sitting by her, and taking her hand lovingly in both of his.

"Oh, father, if some disaster or accident has occurred!"

"You must not submit to such folly, my darling. Don't you know that, as well known as I am, or she, either as for that, if an accident should have happened, however small, that we would at once be notified?"

"I hope so," said she, nestling her head under his arm. She vainly tried to dispel the gloom that heedlessly crept over her.

The husband and father bravely and secretly bore for the sake of his sick wife the dark, heavy, depressive anxiety. After the first two days passed, and no message from her or any of her friends, he was wholly at a loss for an excuse, having made so many for her non-appearance. The mother grew frantic; her grief was, in her very weakened, nervous state, fearful, and the old family physician shook his head gravely when the husband asked.

"I fear a seriousness that will be difficult to hold in subjection if I can't succeed in keeping

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her extremely quiet." He administered a quieting potion, and wanted the continued service of an attendant in the sick room, which was at once obeyed. The perplexed, inexpressible fear of the already saddened father was pitiful. This last ray of hope was centered in the reply from her betrothed and Nina, both of whom he had just written. This little hope was his strength as he paced the floor of the library. If she had deceived his confidence or in the least failed to comply with every promise she had made, he would be very much mistaken in her. He would not allow himself to dwell on the grave and darker mesmeric thoughts that would pop up in his mind regardless of his stubborn resistance. He had posted the letters to both George and Nina and expected an answer by the next mail. The letter was received by Nina before the one addressed to George was.

CHAPTER XXI.

As George Allwane was now so enthused about the result of the election, but every man with an interest in that portion of the country was enthused also, and since the two or three joint discussions, many, many, had been shown the unbiased truths, laying bare the cancerous treachery of the well-guarded official pie.

Where the presence of honor and municipal equality was a grinning, infected skeleton, se-

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curely locked in by the usurpers, as the walls of this closet were so worn and decayed that the light of opposition was peeping in, they were growing extremely alarmed, and, finding after examination that the mortar for the mending had stood the sun and exposure too long to stick, and if applied it would heedlessly fall back ere the applying hand could be lowered. Realizing this very unexpected, disastrous calamity, the leaders and manipulating managers, in utter alarm and amazement, stood up and looked about. Viewing with consternation the intensity of purpose and the already strong hold the insignificant fellows were gaining, they set out with renewed vigor, and went to work sending sentinels in every direction with all manner of reports.

George had spent a very exciting day, and with the ever preëminent distressing view of the conduct of the opposition, and laboring under the conflicting presentiment of an unavoidable barrier that had caused Dolly's silence, ready with a bountiful, sympathetic love to clasp her in a forgiving embrace and fill her heart with the love that had fretted and pined, growing more firm and tender as the billows of an apparent disastrously plain contradiction, royal in its bare robes of sparkling sincerity. Conflicting conviction and an open condemning evidence waged an incessant war in the saddened chamber of his overtaxed heart, and when he was met down the avenue as he was near home, and,

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silently handed him the letter of inquiry, he looked from Nina's distressed, pale face at the postmark.

"What is it, Nina? I can't—I read my doom in your face, quick, tell me, is she——"

"Ah! George, you are as big a dunce as I, I do believe, but read, and then let's talk."

He read the missive over and over again.

"What do you think, George?" He looked steadily and earnestly at her, as if trying to arrive at a conclusion. The contents were so widely different from the impressions hurled at him that he could not arrive at any plausible or legitimate theory.

"All I know," said he finally, never moving his gaze from her face, "is that there is somewhere a horrible, miserable mistake. I can't at present offer any light on the subject, but there is an unpardonable crime somewhere. Nina, my only sister, when this dawned on me, the very thought of my darling the prey, oh, God, to what? That is my terrifying, maddening thought."

"What, dear George, we must not stop to grieve. The hour has come for action, and we must not lose a moment; every one lost counts greatly against us."

"Oh, heavens, my precious darling, if I could relieve the distress that I fear you are suffering this eve, I would gladly offer my life or the price asked, whatever it be."

"Dear George, my heart bleeds for you. I

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know in this excruciating hour that your cup seems indeed filled to overflowing, and the draught is dark and bitter. When your precious face is so full of anguish and doubtless unbearable tortures."

"Oh! for God's sake, don't hint that she is forced to bear——" He could not finish, his face was deadly ashen, his frame shook, he bowed his head, took his hat in one hand, and placing the other on Nina, they walked silently back to town.

As they neared the post office, he was hailed by Mr. Vining, coming frantically from his office, walking rapidly. His expression resembled the face of abject misery and woe, mingled with the furies of a thundering, howling tornado.

"Mr. Vining, what has happened? Can I help you?" he said.

"My God, I am ruined, I am ruined!" He got to where they were standing, beating his hat in hand unconsciously against his legs, throwing his hands up and down. He walked around and around George, still lashing himself and repeating this.

"Well, I'm ruined! I'm ruined! I'm ruined!"

In his excitement and thorough interest for his suddenly demoralized condition, George forgot his own sorrow. In his earnest desire to ascertain and relieve, if possible, the distracting happening, he tried to get him to tell what was the matter.

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"Oh, my God! What will I do? He has ruined me!"

After a time spent in quizzing, suggesting and guessing, George led the old man to the steps, motioned him to sit by him, and by reading to him the letter he had just received from Dolly's father, said:

"What! Read that again; I can't comprehend. In the name of all that's holy and righteous, the devil and his army of hounding imps have turned loose the host of long-winded bulldogs and set them down in the very center of our little town. Oh! I am ruined. What will I do? What will I do?"

"Tell me what you think the trouble is here," said George, pointing to the letter.

"I think while you are talking with Mr. Vining, that I will run and tell mamma the news," said Nina.

"Oh, no! I would spare her a little while. Don't you think it best?"

"No; I have just reasoned the identical question in my own mind, concluding, since there is no secret, that sooner than we anticipate some one will tell her. So I prefer she know it directly and just the true nature. I will return presently."

"Well, what important verdict is this honored body hung or disagreeing on? Surely the morality and the uniform congeniality of our little people would never excite the slightest ripple on our waters of quiet peace and happiness."

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They looked quickly around, and beheld standing with a broad smile on her radiant face and a merry twinkle in her eyes. "Ah, ah, I slipped up on you all, tra la la la," chimed Delia.

Nina, who was just ready to start, stopped, and, like the others, was utterly astounded to see her dropping, as it were, down from some queer, unknown place.

"Daughter! Where did you drop from? I never saw you coming," said the very much surprised father.

"What is the trouble, father, you look more like a dead papa than a live one. Are you sick?" said she, going to him and rubbing his face and head gently. "What can be the trouble—what has caused this sudden look of anxiety?"

"One thing that has moved its hearers to intolerable, ambitious alarm is the sad news of the missing whereabouts of our dear little Dolly," said Nina, before her father could reply.

"Yes, yes; that is one of the distressing anxieties," Delia exclaimed, with a brazen, deceptive effrontery. "Truly, you are joking. There was nothing of an alarming nature just a day or two ago," said she, as her expression saddened, and she grew lovingly earnest, and led the conjecturing comments with unsuspecting interest, treating indirectly, however, the subject as a joke, emphasizing the evidence in her possession, affirming the ridiculous surmises of their wholly unfounded trouble, and laughing heartily at their crossing the bridge before they were

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even in sight of the stream. While they sat, with folded hands and long faces, moping and turning their heads gray, with broken hearts and quivering lips, picturing calamity after calamity, burdening their heart and mind with a superfluous, inconsolable grief, she was buried in the midst of a bright, dazzling whirl of gayety, with the alluring flattery of a dozen beaux pouring into her dainty ears the very essence of sweet-sounding flattery, vying with each other as to who shall be the next to drive to jealous desperation. "Who is it, pray tell me, that would not play truant, for a little while at least, with such magnificent homage?" said she laughing. Her scheme was a desperate one, and she was jubilant with the apparent ease and assurance her apologetic amends made. The irony to all but Nina was plausible, but when Nina, with an emphatic voice said:

"I can't and positively refuse to associate my dear Dolly with any semblance of such a deceptive nature. There is not a shadow of comparison to her, in any of the imaginary suggestions, as limited as my associations are with her, I don't find the faintest hint of her sweet, pure, sympathetic nature in such a dissimulating pleasure; many and oft are the expressions of contempt and loathing for such deceptive amusement I have heard her utter."

"Ah, ha! There is where the fun comes in, to me. Having known her, indeed, intimately for a goodly length of time, and joining heartily in

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the identical, enthusiastic amusement repeatedly, even insisting many times, when the frail strength seemed taxed to its utmost endurance, that she be more considerate, fearing a collapse, and with a jolly toss of her pretty and fascinating head, she would join the next partner and on they go. So you see, you are mis-impressed," said Delia, with a sarcastic smile, and whirling around on her heel that she might get a closer view of George's face.

Arriving, if possible, at the effect of her treacherous, disastrous, false accusations, the quick conception of Nina saw and was really thankful that his head was so low that the brim of his hat entirely hid his sad face. What a pity she was deprived of this convincing evidence! Had the anticipated pleasure, she so prayed, her animation and coveted success and progress would have had a severe and thwarted blow stamped boldly in his frank and conscientious countenance, the plain unmistakable evidence of his overwhelmed emotion and depth of sincerity a truly convincing fact that the light of mere respect was flickering and dim in his heart, and the brazen, tantalizing babbling was sorely contradictory in the extreme to the intended influential impressive explanation. Her gigantic deception was bedecked so magnificently that the grinning, bulky, flabby form was by close observance visible in consideration of the convincing evidence that personally she was a loyal, confiding, sympathetic friend, and now when all is

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buried in the very depths of a dreary, dark, forboding suspense, alert, trembling, with bated breath every moment, for a shadow of intelligence notwithstanding the pretended well-founded evidence just submitted, there was an apparent lack of sincerity that whispered to Nina and George, who looked at each other and read instantly deep in each other's heart, the untruth.

A suspicion that to their despondent, troubled minds was a faint ray of light, furnishing food for a very unexpected information, which had just previously been foreign to them, but joint discussion of our mutual friends doesn't relieve this very extraordinary expression of trouble and sorrow that is so annoying.

"Can't you tell me? Oh, I am ruined, I am ruined!"

"What, father—what do you mean?" said she, gathering his arm close to her. "I must know; won't you tell me."

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen! I wonder if I may join your pleasant and interesting little party?"

"Ah, here is Mr. Crookshanks! Glad to have you," said another.

"Yes; perhaps you can calm the troubled water, Mr. Crookbreeches," said Mr. Vining, "for, by the holy smoke, I am ruined! Oh, I am ruined," wailed he, springing up and throwing his arms up and down, as he madly walked around. So intent was he in his distracting

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trouble that he did not notice the amused expression and twittering undertone laughing, until Mr. Crookshanks cleared his throat and laughed out heartily. Walking up to him, he reached his hand and grasping Mr. Vining's, still laughing, said: "Mr. Vining, I have the pleasure of introducing Mr. Crookshanks."

"The devil," said he, "don't I know——"

"Not if——"

"I see," said he, "that is what you all were so tickled about."

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I am ruined—ruined."

"I can't see that you are so bad as all that," said he, jokingly trying to calm him.

"That's the trouble—I could not see or did not suspect, and now I am ruined."

"Father, come, let's go home," said Delia very anxiously. "I think you need to rest and have a strong cup of coffee. You will be better prepared to know just how to proceed with this awful calamity. I have some very urgent duties that I want to finish, if I get off on my visit."

"I can't go at present, daughter. Tell your mother that I will be there presently. But don't tell her that there is anything unusual."

"But, father, I am so anxious myself."

"Oh, no, no, dear; don't be worried. It is just a trivial business matter that I hope to have adjusted very soon."

"Very well; I will not wait long for you, if you don't come, I will be after you."

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The anxiety displayed for her father's care was an apparent excellent excuse, thought she, to get him away from those searching, penetrating eyes of the stranger. Delia had a thorough abhorrence for him. She felt when in his presence that the most remote recesses of life were being probed to the very depths, and great was her consternation when he very unexpectedly appeared.

"Surely he could not have heard my commendable opinion of her. My God, how miserably hateful he is. If I could get a clew to you, you prowling devil, I'd shut you up for a while, you old bear. I hate you," as she turned to go, she glanced at him, caught him looking her straight in the eyes. She could have screamed, and, with great difficulty, she steadied her voice and self to say a few parting words, and walked straight home. She was frightened when she hurried off, and more determined to get off at once than before.

The subject of Dolly's whereabouts was not alluded to again, and when they parted she asked very solicitously of Mrs. Simpkins, rejoicing at the kind Providence that softened her father's stubborn will and placed her in his tender care at the most trying hour of her saddened life. She was under the untiring and constant care of Old Mother, who was the antidote that apparently was the successful pilot that was steering the weak, frail craft to a haven of safety. The patient father, who stood

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near when Nina gently related the contents of the missive to her mother.

"What did you say, madam? Who was it?"

She repeated to the aged man the intelligence that, too, was a source of profound grief. As they conversed a short space from the room where the bed was, so that the noise would not disturb the sufferer, who had stopped on the brink of eternity, with no sign of recognition in her wanderings, wholly oblivious to all her grief, and the kind, loving faces, who so patiently watched by her side. As Nina, in her excited eagerness spoke quite loud, she suddenly threw out her arms, looking blankly at her, and said:

"Oh, I have waited for you to come, my precious angel, Nina! Nina!" she pleaded and sank back exhausted, with no other sign of intelligence. After their excitement was over, they continued their chain of romance. Nina was sitting near the old gentleman on her way home, and by chance they exchanged a few remarks, speaking of her sad errand to her sick mother, and how she was so deeply grieved to leave the suffering darling and the grief-stricken, careworn mother. The kindly face of the old man, whose stubborn heart and relentless conscience had caused Nina to stop and excitedly ask if he had suddenly become ill.

"No, child; go on, go on! Oh, God have mercy, go on!"

"But," said she, "you look so very ill that I

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must beg your pardon for imposing innocently a truth that is undoubtedly so extremely touching; truly, I am sorry to have caused you such intense pain."

"Oh, my dear madam, the pain is by no means a fresh one. It is of years' standing; it is an old eating, gnawing, cankerous offensive cavity, unhealed by the hand of time."

"Oh, thank God," cried Nina. "Are you her father? Thank Heaven, I know you will forgive her now, when I tell you she is starving—yes, positively starving, her poor famished, dreary life is fast ebbing, and her one craving desire is for your forgiveness. Oh, for the mercy you hope to receive at the great forgiving seat, where greater sins than hers find sweet rest and forgiveness, and pillow their weary, tired head on the loving bosom of a Father more greatly sinned against than you; oh, if you only knew, if you knew as I do, you would hasten to her. If you expect to meet a loving Saviour, as you value your future peace and happiness, give her the one great consuming desire of her life. Now when her life is one long, dark, gloomy, pitiless, starless night, with not a hint of light to cheer her as she drifts across the surging billows of sorrow, promise me that you will hasten to her."

"Where is my child—is he still living?"

"Who do you mean, her husband? Yes, yes, sir, he is living; and for that reason, under the

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existing circumstances, they need you, not him. Yes, him," said she positively. "If he was strong and was not compassed about by so great an army of dangerous, influential demons, pointing with sparkling, alluring, treacherous promise at the habits of the man, the real man being paralyzed long since, he needs you, as any other wayward brother needs the strong one."

She told him where to find her, and as the train pulled up to the junction, she was assured with a hearty grasp and "God bless you," and fast-falling tears streaming from both their eyes, that, "He would find her at once."

Now, as he sits over her apparent lifeless form, he has still another pang added to his heavy burden. Joining earnestly in Nina's plans, she mentioned the fact that George was waiting for her.

When she arrived at the post office, she found greater excitement than when she left. People were hurrying from place to place with the news that Sapp had skipped the country, robbing the company of all its capital. The president, old man Vining, is wild. He's pawing the air like a madman. When this reached the sympathetic ears of Nina, she could not suppress the relieving "Thank God. Oh, I thank Thee, oh God, for the strength given me to save myself from this awful, heinous, terrible monster," and when she met George a few moments later, said: "Oh, I feel like flying; I never felt more re-

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lieved in my life. Only just think of what I am spared."

"Are you truly happy; is there not deep in your heart the pang of disappointment that will ultimately wear the emblem of the weeds you came so near harvesting?" Her look of mingled joy and astonishment was relieved when she saw the smile about his mouth and the merry twinkle in his eye. She was forced to admit that deep in her heart there was a vacant, lonely spot that she could not drive away, that regardless of her resistance, she would find herself lost in his memory.

As they walked slowly on, deeply engrossed in the happenings of the day, he was attracted by hearing his name, as they neared the Vining home: "Mr. Allwane, can't you see a friend? Come in."

Looking around, he saw Delia. Nina pleaded an excuse, but she would not accept, finally finding that he was the one she wanted, she said in an undertone: "I will go, you stop for a while." He very reluctantly went in.

"I am going away in the morning, and I could not bear to have you pass and not say a few words of good-by."

"But you must not think of such a thing as to tear your dear self away from us, especially at this crucial, exciting time. Truly, I can't bear to have you go."

"The idea of your missing me is absurd."

"Oh, Mr. Allwane! If I thought you really

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cared, I would be so happy," said she, with assumed embarrassment.

"Cared! You can't mean it, Miss Delia—that you are so blind, or perhaps from preference, that you ignore such esteem, my dear. The light of my whole existence, my all-absorbing thought, the one single burning desire, ah, the height of the eternal heavens, the depths of the lowest pits, the length and breadth of this broad earth and the fullness thereof could not measure the craving burning desire to hear fall from your precious lips those sweet, life-giving words."

Her face shone with a radiance that made it almost beautiful. The soft, silvery eloquence of her enthusiastic avowals was so very infinitely surprising, he was taken so significantly earnest, so thoroughly opposite his intention, his chagrin was pathetically amusing. He made a feeble effort in his bewildered predicament to divert the subject, that he might indirectly lead her to a more intelligent construction of his jesting.

"Fate was mercilessly harsh in her lashing," thought he. "What in the very dickens am I to do? I must correct this grave misunderstanding. I will not. Ah! never, never." If he had been disposed, as the majority of men, the zenith of a gloriously bright horizon would be so beautiful in its anticipated pleasure that the perilous, treacherous and doubtless destructive in its final finish would not make the slightest shadow in its conscientious flight across the premeditated sky, but his heart sank within him, and his

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conscience would not submit the faintest hint of the deceptive nature to loiter in its rigid sanctum.

He spoke of the different subjects that were so vital now, and tried to dwell on the disastrous effect of the bold and daring theft of the firm, and how great was his surprise when the truth was forced on him. That he had the most profound respect and confidence in him, and felt sure it would be adjusted to the perfect satisfaction and interest of all concerned, asking if she knew just when he left.

"Oh, mercy; no, indeed. I only wish that I did! My poor father would not have been so outrageously robbed. But we should feel thankful, dear, that we are being relieved of a few of the dangerous characters that seem bent on the destruction of our most reliable ones. My dear George, be careful, you are situated similarly to poor papa, in having such a variety of men in your employ, and apparently some very unworthy, that I feel a dread for you, especially in this last one."

"Thank you sincerely for your interest in my behalf, and I assure you that I will be found watching, as well as praying; however, I must say that I feel your fears of the one you spoke of just now are somewhat biased, for some plausible reason of your own. I fear you are led to censure him harshly and unjustly. He is very fond of you, and, being of the lineage he has the honor to dote, I had the effrontery to

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build an elaborate castle, with all the imaginary grandeur and beauty that the fairy godmothers could afford, with you and him at the very zenith of this luxurious bliss, praying that Old Father Time might linger or command the sun to stay, though you have the years of Methusaleh."

"Oh, horrors!" said she, throwing up her clasped hand. "To think of such a repulsive affair, sends a chill of terror through me that is sickening."

"Why, just think, you and he in all this royal bliss and Dolly and I nearby, where we could have a friendly chat, regardless of the weather."

"Oh, how dare you? You are cruel. Ah, to know that I love you as I do, and to hear, falling from your lips, the pleasure and happiness that has cost me my life. Oh! I can't bear it. I do not love and could never love any but you. Oh, my darling, the imagination, the miserable, bitter thought of your precious name being linked to another would drive me to desperation—never!"

"Pshaw, Miss Delia, I could never have been lassoed, bound and pounded with the mallet of deceit, and believed that you would have been guilty of such grave flattery; and knowing as you do, the existence of the profound admiration and love that so wholly fills my heart for Dolly."

"You, as well as we, are at this very instant mourning the loss of her whereabouts. Ah! how I have longed that in the near future, that the discovery of her distorted affections would

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drive the glorious dream of my heart to a bosom that will treasure and guard it as closely and tenderly as the passionate nature is capable," sobbed Delia.

"My dear Miss Delia," said he, seating himself again near her, "there is no lady of whom I have the honor of friendship that is esteemed more than you are. In my estimation, you are a jewel, a woman far superior in ability, the one that will be the beckoning guide to lead the stumbling, weary ones whose oppressive burden and the weary darkness is well nigh crushing the life from your sisters, whose life has not been so abundantly blessed as yours has, and who is groping out a miserable existence, longing and yearning for a helping hand that you are so capable of lending."

"There, you have been an apt pupil, and doubtless as deceptive as your teacher, who with her prating and long-faced apparent intercessions, succeeded in her speculative deception."

"Hush, woman! You shall not judge a purity of purpose in such a malignant bitter spirit. Miss Delia, you must consider your expressions. They are not from your heart, I know, and will not believe they are. Our little quarrel is now quite grown up, and we must shake hands and make up. I had no idea that our jestings would cover so much space.

"I am sure they think me lost, at home. I hope you will have sweet dreams, dreams," said

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she, in an absent, suppressed tone, "Dreams, ah! that my dreams could be real."

"You are not going away so soon, are you? I can't bear it, as I go to and from home, and not see your bright face or hear your sweet, musical voice and laugh, would indeed be a loss."

"Oh! Do you mean that you would miss me? Oh! do you tell me that you think of me? Ah! That's the sweetest sound that ever soothed an aching heart."

She looked up at him, a strange, weird expression shining from her eyes. When, of a sudden, she said, as she raised her hands partially:

"My love, my love, oh, for God's sake, you will——" and with a stifled scream, she fell back in her chair.

George jumped to catch her, and called for help. Her mother came, and, as she entered, he said: "She has fainted I fear; quick with some restorative."

The frightened mother began to scream and beg her to live. "Oh, just speak, and open your eyes."

George finally assured her that there was nothing serious, that as soon as the doctor could get there and administer something strengthening she would be herself again. He advised her to have the maid assist her to get Delia to her room. He gave the maid a few hints as to her comfort, the demoralized mother running from place to place, wringing her hands, and weeping

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in their effort to carry the helpless form to her bed. The mother said:

"Oh, Mr. Allwane, can't you help? I fear they will hurt her."

"Certainly, madam; with pleasure."

He followed quickly, and taking her in his arms, laid her on her bed.

The physician entered and made a hasty examination and administered an antidote.

"Ah! I wonder what in the mischief will happen to me next. I think the prowling demons she said were at large in the town have all centered their revenge on me." He stood back to give room to some of the excited sympathizers. He looked around, to find himself leaning against the dresser. A sense of irresistible curiosity seized him, and he looked down on the dainty articles. His eyes wandered from one to another.

"I swear I am not dreaming, but what in the deuce is this?"

His strong frame quivered, and for the first time in his life he felt a desire to snatch an object and stamp it under his foot. The indignant blood surged through his veins, and he felt as though he could not master a consuming desire to demand the insulting reason.

There before his eyes lay the precious likeness of his missing darling. With the eyes cut out and the outline of a casket drawn boldly over the form, with the mocking, grinning words:

"I know you are pleased; don't you fear. I

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do my work well." Near it was the likeness of Delia and him in the same double frame.

"How on earth came she by a picture of me, I am at a loss to know." He wanted to take it away, as his eyes sought the repelling, blood-curdling sight.

"Ah, my God! What does this mean?" He closely gazed at the designing outline, while his stern, immobile countenance was pale. He felt an inexpressible horror as a vague meaning of the line written under the drawing occurred to him. His imagination was so paralyzed, his whole being so thoroughly astounded at the blackened sin and hideous deception, the awful, agonizing torture, that loomed boldly at him, saying: "This is a mere hint in comparison to the accursed depravity and suffering that is gloatingly heaped on a helpless victim."

As the doctor gave a few directions as to her care and comfort, he looked at him:

"Are you going now, Mr. Allwane."

"Yes, sir. Are you ready as quick as this?" asked George.

"For the present. I will come again in a short while."

They walked out. George scarcely knew what to do. His dazed reasoning faculties for an instant refused to act. As he started homeward, a deep groan escaped him, and a depression that weighed on him and caused his drawn, pale face to look aged.

"How truly the hand of an all-wise Guidance

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ushered me into this home, that I might regard less my own humiliation and painful experience. I accept it with sincere gratitude, and consider the cost a mere trifle in comparison with the terrible but anxious information regarding my darling. But, pshaw! What am I doing? George Allwane, you are a fool. I am forcibly impressed that you are sadly in need of a nurse, not a guardian. I must find Crookshanks, at once—this information will, no doubt, prove of great value. God grant that it may.” Whirling around, he hastened at once to confer with the one who so readily and with apparently no clew, discovered the author of the destructive fire.

As George sat for a while, waiting for Mr. Vining and Mr. Crookshanks to finish their work, he said: “If I had my mother’s sweet, consoling face to look into in this hour of trouble, what a relief it would be. But ah, dear mother, you were snatched from me just when I needed you most, and now, darling mother, as the bleeding cavity of your absence was healing with an antidote that I know you would approve, she, too, is snatched from me. Oh, my God! only for the strength and endurance instilled in this worthless body of mine, and the precious memory of your sainted face that has stayed me in hours of yore when sorrow, like sea billows roll, I could not stand it. I could not endure this most excruciating pain. The harrowing suspense of knowing that my darling needs me, and

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I can't—I don't know where or how to relieve her. Oh, mother! the thought maddens me. But I will not be a child; a man can boldly confront the devil's business, but when his heart is touched, he is a child."

"What in the name of Heaven is the matter with you, Allwane? You look like a ghost. Come, let's get out of this close place and get some fresh air," said Mr. Crookshanks.

"Mr. Vining, I am just from your home and your daughter is quite sick."

"Ah! there it is again. I am ruined! I am ruined! Poor child, to see me in trouble is too much for her. I am ruined! Poor thing, she could not bear to see her old father in the grasp of the very devil. I must go; you say she is very sick?"

"Not serious, I hope, sir. The doctor pronounced it a faint from excitement."

"And you say she fainted? Poor child, poor child! Thank you, Mr. Allwane. Oh! I'll swear I am ruined. So help me God, if I had that thief and scoundrel by the nape of his neck, I would sling him into the middle of where he ought to be. Good-by, boys. Crooklegs, get to work, for God's sake, at once, before he gets out of reach," said the old man, his excitement and trouble having unnerved him so that he tottered as he walked off.

"That old fellow has the gloom of a midnight darkness hovering over his head. That beauti-

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ful daughter of his has a finger in this pie," said he, still smiling over the ridiculous miscall of his name by the father.

"You can't mean that she would be so cruelly heartless as to willfully perjure herself criminally? Nay, brutal, as to be an accomplice to so heartless a deed as to rob her own father."

"The very fiends of hell will hide their faces for shame. Let me add to your surmises a truth that will cause you hair to rise and your heart to freeze."

"Ah, ha! my son," said he, patting him on the shoulder, "I have come in contact with a goodly number, so 'Tarnashus' hellish that the prince of the devils dared me to unearth another, swearing that if his subjects could so far outwit him that he would step down and hand over his crown."

"Pshaw, man, you would provoke a laugh if a person was at a funeral."

"From the evidence I saw just a few moments since, I fear that an immediate funeral would be a relief."

He related all that had happened, how he was forced to aid the family to get her to bed, how he happened to go near the dresser, drawn by some premonitive mesmeric power, to satisfy an uncontrollable curiosity, he saw lying in a folder the photograph of Dolly with her eyes cut out and the outline of a casket in bold color around it.

"Did you take it?"

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"Take it? No, but I wanted it. I was never so tempted in my life."

"Fool that you are! Here, I can't permit——"

"Permit the devil! Why, all the Vinings in the whole business could not have kept that from my hands, knowing what I do, fearing, heavens knows what, and let such as that slip. I must have that before the sun rises again."

"Hush! stop; let me think. I have it. Now, come just as fast as you can; get Nina, and you and her go there before they get over their excitement. Don't wait to explain; just say on your way that there is something on her dresser that she will recognize as Dolly, and emphasize that I must have it. She can offer her services for the night. I will spend the night with you. But I want you to go this minute, Mr. Allwane. This means a great deal, and I trust you to aid me this much."

George was not aware of his excited haste until Nina, half out of breath, said:

"George, stop, and I will go with you. You go on as though your life depended on just the specified second you arrived there to get the object you are after. Calm yourself, or you will excite comment."

"I beg your pardon, Nina dear, but I admit that I realize to-night I am a weak simpleton. Just the little while you left me here is sufficient to confound stronger men than I, especially when the safety of one's own precious love is at stake. The consciousness of the peril, or

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maybe the torture, inch by inch, of her life, and to be helpless to aid her—great God, Nina, 'tis maddening."

As they entered the door the doctor was leaving.

"Ah, I knew I could depend on you. I am so glad you have come. She is still resting very quietly. There is no one in there but that numbskull of a girl, who I believe could out-sleep Rip Van Winkle, if some one did not wake her. The poor mother is distracted with grief, and I gave her a soothing dose, which I hope will produce sleep."

Nina was much relieved at this information.

After a few consoling words to Mrs. Vining, she offered her service for the night.

"Thank you, dear; I will have no fears of her care as long as you are with my precious darling."

"I hope that you will try to calm yourself, dear Mrs. Vining, and get all the rest and sleep that you can, or I will have two patients instead of one."

"Ah, child, how easy to advise. I realize the truth, my dear, but the pain that is pressing my—" putting her hand to her heart, "is more sensible than the effect of sleep. I wish I could sleep—it would be a sweet relief to be able to drop into oblivion until the sorrow and loss could be adjusted. I appreciate the sympathy, but, dear, 'tis one thing to sympathize and an-

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other to realize; experience is the only real sympathizer."

Nina thought she could never tear herself away from the mother. As she entered Delia's room, her anxious eyes sought the spot, but her heart sank as she saw nothing that resembled the treasure she coveted so much.

"Good evening, Susieanne."

"'Low, miss. I am so glad to see you."

"Have you had much company since Miss Delia has been so ill?"

"Oh, no, ma'am. The doctor won't let anybody in here. He says that she must be as still and quiet as a mouse."

"Certainly she must," said Nina. "I know you are tired and worried. If you want me to, I will sit by her, and you can get some fresh air."

"Yes, ma'am; I am so worn out, I can't be still a minute but that I drop off to sleep."

After she was out some time, and Nina had arranged her patient comfortably, she busied herself in making the room orderly. Her conscience was so aware of the delicacy and inexperience of her errand that she felt that a dozen eyes were centered on her, and the thump, thump of her excited heart-beats was sufficient to wake the soundest sleeper. She could not help smiling at her folly.

Going to the bed and assuring herself that the sick girl was sleeping, she took an unusual amount of pains in placing each little article in position. Her heart sank as she searched every-

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thing, as nowhere could she find what she was after. She felt sick with disappointment.

An oppressive sigh escaped her, as she turned wearily toward the sick bed.

"Oh, how truly I regret this disappointment. They will censure me with indifference and negligence, when Heaven knows I would sacrifice anything for my dearest Dolly's relief."

She sat by the bed for some time. Memories of the past, mingling with the experience of the present, and the sad, disappointed reverie was broken by the groans and tossing of the sick.

She drew near and spoke softly to her, asking a few questions, to which the weary, vacant expression of the momentous staring eyes answered very audibly. With a few mumbling sounds, she closed her eyes and fell asleep.

Nina, weary of sitting idle, went to the table to get a magazine, and, beneath a collection of loose papers, thrown there apparently in the excitement, she drew the book out, when some of the papers began to fall, and as she caught them, exclaimed: "Oh, thank God!" She pressed her hands to her heart, and stood fixed to the spot. There before her eyes was the crowning assurance of her mission. Her trembling form sickened, and she caught at the chair to stay her. The appalling mutilation of this token of love, the loathing, revengeful significance of the brutal heartlessness of its plight, conveyed the impression of an agonizing, torturing death.

She snatched it up, thrust it quickly into her

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bosom, and walked as best she could around the room, that she might calm her agitation. Tears streamed fast and thick down her pallid cheek, as she, in her imagination, saw her darling Dolly in the brutal clutches of some gloating fiend, pleading for mercy. She had read of how the Indians would beat and drag their victims by the hair of the head, and so real was her imaginary vision that when she neared the window and heard the tap, tap, she uttered a low scream and sank in the seat by her.

The window was up a few inches. She was called to her senses by a familiar voice.

"Don't be alarmed, brave girl. You are a jewel. Don't look, but throw your finding, with some waste paper, out of the window."

She sat as mute as a statue for an instant, when the voice said:

"Be quick, child. Act now." She obeyed mechanically, carrying out the instructions perfectly. As she threw it out, she heard a voice say: "Well done; I have it."

She wondered how Mr. Crookshanks knew she had found it.

"That does not materially affect me; it's the relief of the burden that fills my soul with ease and freedom. Oh! I am so relieved. Ah!" thought she, as a chill of horror ran over her, "I don't believe I could have done it to save my life—kept that awful reminder near my heart. Oh, Father of Heaven, spare me from a realization of my horrible fears, and oh, dear

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Lord, if it be Thy will, appoint me at once to discover and relieve my lost darling. Oh, Father, I beg Thee to provide a hasty means and guidance to direct me to her; oh, dear Father, I do beseech Thee to spare her to us again. Heal the bleeding, torn hearts of her distracted parents and loved ones. Precious Father, bring to a speedy surface the culprits whose dissimulating, black, murderous hearts have heaped such an enormous depth of inexpressive sorrow and anxiety."

She sat calmly, with her thoughts centered now on the form lying prostrate, urging back the accusing evidence that would ridicule her doubly as they led her gently along from the first night of their meeting, as she was an innocent, unsuspecting eavesdropper to a clandestine meeting, concocting the foul deed, and the manouvers of other times. The stinging remarks, apparently innocently and unintentionally made, pointing to divers other instances that crowded on her, daring her to doubt. Seeing the wan, pain-distorted face, with now and then an unintelligent murmur, she could not credit it with such blasting destructive heartlessness as was mournfully her portion.

The night wore heavily on, and other than the few doses that she gave her without resistance, Nina grew weary and lonely ere the dawn of another day.

When the day broke, she hurried to her mother with the news.

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CHAPTER XXII.

"Ah, how thankful I am that a kind Providence has arranged it so that you can have some needed rest, precious mother. When I look at your thin, pale face, I wonder if our blessed Lord requires of you a persistence that will very soon rob those dependent on you of all that life holds dear. Mother, mother! My heart is grieved sorely; go home, when you see her off, and don't move from your room until I return," said Nina.

"I am so relieved to know her Father is taking her home."

As Mrs. Simpkins' recovery was so extremely slow, and the anxious father could not be away from home longer, he carried her safely on a cot to the tender care of a loving mother and more efficient physicians.

Nina separated from them with tears, and was left to wait her train at the same place where poor Dolly remembered her being last, in a long unconscious lapse of hours.

When she had said a few words to the old snipe of a woman, trying to convince her of her sanity, and, finding the effort of no avail, she could not move her deadened limbs, which were to an extent becoming conscious of their brutal bondage, while the pain was so severe she

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pleaded piteously for help. When of a sudden the old devil of a man came rushing in, and stormed at the woman, who was standing there looking at Dolly, her eyes sparkling in their savage vengeance, he shouted at her:

"Why in the devil hain't you done whut I telled ye?" Grabbing the bottle, he sprang at her. "Oh! don't please! Oh, Father in Heaven, help!" The bottle was vigorously tilted back and forth, saturating the large rag.

"Oh, sir, I am not insane—I know what I am saying."

"That's hit, Josh, she's been a-gowin' on, an' a-cussin' at me," said the wife. "I knowed she's as crazy's a lather whing bat."

"Please, oh, please don't; I will do anything you say!"

"Oh, yes, you little she-devil, I've hearn the like of you afore."

She raised her tender, slim hands in an imploring, pleading voice. He bounced at her, crammed the well-saturated cloth to her face. She groaned as it was pressed close to her nose and mouth, while crushing her arms down with his knee to prevent their feeble quiver, saying gloatingly:

"Now, by gad, yawl l'arn some sense."

The stillness and death-like appearance of the helpless victim assured him that his power over her was pleasing to his fiendish desire. As he eased his knee from the already bound limbs, his eyes gazing fixedly and exultantly at her face,

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raising his hand slowly, watching intently, as if to clutch her at the first movement; he raised his shaggy, slothful form to its full height, with a grinning smile on his face, standing still, looking down on her, he was further assured of his wicked intention. Looking around to the woman, he turned with an important air.

"That's the way to fix 'em. When the sly puss comes 'round ag'in, you bet she'll act like fo'ks, by gad," said he.

"Jake Stephens, I think yer'll have a de'd gal on yore han's if these here two yeyes uv mine kin loke strate. You had better begin to think whut oul's nest or ghopher hole your gwine ter kiver hur in.

"I hain't had nothin' to do in it; whut'n the devil you wantin' the like o' hur. jes' since yu git your share uv the spondulix; you har?"

"Now, stop yore damn ticklin' mi chin, or y'll be short uv one," said he, as he swung his arm around and struck her a blow on the face.

"Confound that black hart uv yourn; if you hit me ag'in, I'll fix you, you ugly, low-down thing."

"You will, will yu?" said he, as he gave her another.

"Jake Stephens, I won't stan' fur any more uv that; I tole you, y'ud a blame site better be ten'in' to yore bus'ness than ter be a-beatin' on yore pore ole wife's bones," said she, as she burst into crying.

Wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron,

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she left the room. She left him standing near the hole of a window, silently looking into the distant future. He stood some time, with an occasional glance at the still lifeless form. After a length of time, he went cautiously back to the bed, stood a moment, then, finding her wrist, examined her pulse.

"I 'lowed you c'uldn't kill a crazy gal."

As his eyes feasted on the pure, innocent, wasted face, his depraved black heart felt a pang of remorse, and he muttered, half aloud:

"Hit's a pity to have tu use a purty gal like this'un; I swear if she hain't the fines' luckin' one yit. That ar' las' gal thet wus fotch here wus not half as good looker, by snaps, an my ole brown hat, if I was jes' a fu years y'unger, I'd never let this chickin git out'n my paws." After feeling assured that life was not extinct, he lighted his pipe and walked out.

"I'll swear, ole 'oman, that's the purties' gal yit, hain't she?" said he, laughing heartily.

"Ain't you shamed uv yore ole gray-headed self?" snapped she.

"The devil, no I hain't; ole yeyes kin see purty things, same as y'ung 'uns."

"Jake Stephens, I think hit's hi time fur yu ter be thinkin' uv how yore ole bones ar' gwine ter be buried," said the woman. They muttered and quarreled until the wee small hours and the bright sun of another day was high up in the blue, sending its dancing, frolicsome rays through the many cracks of the hovel that pro-

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tected the inmates from the howling beast and roaring storm without.

Built of rough, round logs, gathered from the bountiful supply so dense than an observer would be gathered to the midst of the tropical wilds where the most ferocious monsters roam and find an impenetrable seclusion unmolested in their gorgeous paradise. Seated near the river bank, where you could hear the splash of the porpoise and the droll bass sound of the bull-frog, as he leaped and splashed in the muddy water, furnished an accompaniment to the grating, dissipating carousals of the inmates of this low abode, whose roof was kindly sheltered by the long, drooping branches of the monster trees forming a high, broad, protecting wall, hiding securely from the outer world the vile deeds of two of the most heartless and sinful persons under the canopy of heaven, whose depravity and monstrous ignorance fitted them admirably for the darkest, most heartless and awful torturing deed known to a barbarous, uncivilized people.

Just how long they had been carrying on this murderous work, they only knew.

The few men of business within a radius of twenty or twenty-five miles, who were forced to receive their merchandise through this port were the only occasional few who ever legitimately crossed the bounds of this hellish precinct.

Old Jake Stephens was so close akin to the

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varmints and wild animals, which so numerously inhabit those wilds, and the old bear, as they termed him, was the only individual who could live there.

"Great stars, Jake Stephens, don't yu see de sun a-shinin' ever'whar'; hur we is in bed yit," said the old woman.

"Aw, the devil; whut does I keer? I'll be up ag'in yu git a bite uv grub."

"Well, I never seed sich a lazy man in all my life; you don't no mo' git a stic' uv wood, or fe'ch a pale uv water, an' if yu wus a king; hit's no mor'n a dirty shame."

"Aw shut yo'r durn growlin', that's whut I got ye fur, and I don't want any mo' uv yore clash, be gosh."

She soon had the meal prepared, muttering all the while. He was soon ready with his lighted pipe. He gave her a few instructions, and walked off toward the warehouse.

When Dolly had lain for a long time her mind and body began to relax. As she lay there, hunger and thirst so possessed her benumbed body that she was blinded by the hot tears that streamed down her cheeks.

She raised her eyes to heaven, and silently sent up a pathetic, pleading petition, begging God to send immediate relief.

"Oh, Father, look down in mercy on my agony; have mercy, oh, God, on my poor, suffering body. Oh, grant that I may be unbound that I may move my aching limbs."

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As she lay there thus absorbed, the door opened and the old hag came in with her simple, though temptingly prepared meal.

She looked into the old woman's face with something of her old-time sweetness.

The old hag sat the plain white plate on the crude table drawn to the side of the bed. She looked hesitatingly at her pure face for a moment, and, without moving her eyes from her, quietly loosened the binding and lifted the deadened feet from their long prison to the floor, talking hold of her arm and drawing her body up at the same time watching her all the while as though she expected her to jump and tear her in shreds.

Dolly raised her eyes with a grateful smile, and said in a low, sweet voice: "Thank you; oh, you are so good and kind."

The look of excitement and fear that spread over the old hag's face closed further word from Dolly just then.

She began to sip her coffee slowly, and put a morsel in her mouth, but finding it almost impossible to swallow, made no further attempt to eat, but continued to sip her coffee.

The old woman was standing near and watching her intently. She looked up at her, and, with a hesitating voice, as though she doubted her request being granted, asked if she might have a Bible to read a few moments.

Without speaking, the old woman went out, returning presently with a handsomely bound small

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Bible. Wiping the cobwebs and dust from it with the corner of her apron and placing it in Dolly's emaciated hands, it fell open at the most consoling and comforting of the Psalms, the twenty-third. Casting her hungry eyes on the open page, she read aloud: "He preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies."

As her heart caught at the crumbs of comfort, she was attracted to the old woman, who had drawn nearer, half bent, her wide-staring eyes making her look far more like the crazy woman, as she shrilly exclaimed: "What yu mean, gal? You mean you got hope, an' God take car' uv yu amung yore enemies? Wud he be the same to me? Say, gal! say, I've been wunderin' these minny yurs ef God cud see, an' wud He."

Dolly looked pityingly on the unhappy, crouching figure, and thought. "Oh, Lord, help me to lead her unto the holy light of Thy gracious love, that washes the darkest sin-racked souls whiter than snow. Yes, yes, dear woman! If you will only look to Jesus, He will save you. He is willing. He loves you just the same as He does me. Oh, won't you accept this precious love?"

"How, gal? How do I know whut to du? Will He come into this place, where nobody cumes till they is feched?" said she.

Hearing a sound, and fearing lest the old bear of a man would catch her conversing with his

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prisoner, she quickly raised up, looking around as if to assure herself, snatched the book from Dolly's hand and went rapidly from the room, securing the door.

"Wall, by gad, hain't she come rond yit?" said the harsh voice of the old man. "I reckon she'd be kinder glad ter git a smell uv dis," holding up for her inspection a beautiful, large fish. "Hav yu giv hur ainy grub yit?"

"I put some in thar, but I hain't seed if she et it ur not."

Dolly lay quietly, thinking of the happening of the last few moments, praying earnestly for guidance and strength that she might be able to lead this miserable, ignorant being to a realization of His redeeming power and love. She was so weak that she could not raise herself without great effort. As she heard the remarks of the old man, a sickening fear came over her, and she lay trembling, as she heard him say to her, "that he would see if the gal had enough sense to know he was a fine gentleman." She closed her eyes with a prayer for strength and protection.

"Ha, here me gal! Ah, ha! Yu look now like yu cudn't cut up an' fite like a wile cat. Ha! ha! ha!" laughed he. "She is a purty fine lukin' gal, she is," muttered he to himself, as he came to the bed.

Dolly's first thought was of screaming, but she thought: "No, I must control myself. He

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will kill me if I make a sound." She could not suppress a groan that was seemingly choking her.

"Oh, yes; she is all rite; ain't ye, me gal?" he said, picking up her hand.

She still held her eyes closed, but with all the strength she had, she tried to release her hand.

"Ah! no, my purty miss, this is too purty an' saf' fur me ter let go. Cain't ye opin dem littel yeyes, an' let a feller git a peep?"

The indignant blood surged to Dolly's cheeks, causing a beautiful pink.

"By gad! ye's, the finest and purtiest critter I ever seed in my life. If ye jes' wern't a crazy gal, by gings, I'd shore have a peach. I jes' cain't help it, if the ole 'oman do see me."

Still grasping her hand, he stooped quickly down and planted a kiss on her lips. She could not suppress a scream of anger as she opened her eyes and spit in his face.

"Oh, you dog of a brute! How gladly I could tear your head off. There is not one drop of human blood in your brutish veins. A dog would not use the advantage of its prey as you have me this instant. Oh, how I hate you! Oh, kill me, kill me this minute! I would rather be dead, a thousand times, than to be forced to have such ignominious insults as I am forced to bear."

"Aw, ha, ha! I see you aire 'a spunky little gal. I like sich as that; I'll take me anurder

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un," he said as he lowered his demonlike head, holding her hands securely in his.

She was utterly helpless to resist as his face neared hers. She gave the best she could by literally filling his face with expectoration.

"What de ye mean, gal, a-spittin' in a gentlem-in's face, the like uv that?" said he angrily, rudely shoving her hands down on her chest.

The glaring, fiendish expression of his face, together with the acute knowledge of her entire helplessness at his hands, frightened her the more. In her struggle to relieve her hands, she raised her feet just enough for him to see them.

"Aw, you sly cat, yu'll be fur runnin' away, but ye dam sho' won't, not as long as ole Jake Stephens can help it." He hastily and quickly bound them. In securing the rope, he drew it so tight that she had to beg him to loosen it, while she weailed piteously.

In a few moments the old woman came in blustering, and said:

"Jake Stephens, I would think yer wud have a spec uv hart in yer ole yaller hide."

"Shut up yore durn lip; don't ye see my face, whar the blame crazy thing hav dun an' kivered hit wid spit?"

"Spit?" she asked, as she came closer to more clearly see.

"Wal! he'p my life," said she, laughing, "whut in de worl' wus yu a-gittin' so close to hur fer, I wud like ter know."

"'Taint nun uv yo cussed bisness."

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"Oh, Father in Heaven, help me! Can't you help me, kind woman? Oh, please loosen the rope! Oh, mother, must I stand this?" She screamed with pain, as she raised her hand, imploring her help.

"Ha haw!" laughed he, so demon-like and exultingly, that Dolly quailed an instant. "I reckon now, by gad, y'll know how to spit in a gentleman's face," said he.

"Oh! oh! mercy, I can't stand it. Do, please kill me, and don't let me be hurt this way."

"I noded she was as crazy as a winged bat, ur she wudn't wanten go de'd. Here, I'll fix her," Dashing for the bottle, he grabbed it, and leaped toward her.

She screamed long and as loud as she had strength.

"Oh, please don't! Oh, Lord, pity! Oh-o-o-o-plea-s-e," was the stifled moaning, as he drew her hands down and threw his leg across her and pressed the chloroformed cloth over her face.

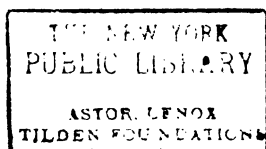
As the last sound was heard from the apparently deathly form, a sound of steps was heard, then a shrieking yell.

"Look, Jake!" cried the old woman.

A timely blow knocked the demon of a man away, and with the cry, "Thank God! Thank God! Found! Oh, my precious darling," George Allwane snatched the insensible form to his bosom, at the same time crying: "My God, Crookshanks, look!"



A timely blow knocked the demon of a man away.
(Den of 16th Section.)—P. 294.



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"I haven't time this moment. You look after her, while the officer and I attend to these two howling devils!"

The old hag was crouching closely in the corner, her face drawn, her eyes staring wildly, her hands raised as if to ward off a blow. The old man, as he wildly looked from one to the other, his surprise at the unexpected appearance of the strangers.

As he regained his dazed senses from the heavy blow George had given him, and the realization of his position dawned on him, he looked around to the hole of a window for a means of escape. With a terrible oath, he drew himself to full height, his manner and expression one of a demon possessed, ferocious monster, in his last desperate leap. With a shrill, wild scream, he leaped with all his strength, aiming for the door. As he jumped, Mr. Crookshanks, designing his intention, quietly stepped to one side, whirled just as the figure passed, threw out his foot, tripping the old man, who fell face to the floor, but, quicker than thought, scrambled to the next room. The detective was right on him. The ruffian, being a huge, powerful man, threw him off, and before he could rise and spring at him, he had his revolver aimed at him. The detective did not halt. A shot rang loudly through the air, then a heavy fall and a scuffling sound of steps, as if trying to escape—again the sound of shot, once, twice.

There were loud cries from the old woman,

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who tried to escape in the excitement, but she was held and handcuffed by the sheriff, who came with them. She lunged and fought and screamed like a maniac.

The very devil in her was aroused as she madly fought for her liberty. The sheriff, having securely bound her, calmly walked away, leaving her to the full realization of her position, and went in quest of the detective, not knowing which he would find dead. Going out, he looked around, and saw seated under a large oak the men, while Nina was weeping and begging Dolly to open her eyes and look at them, as they used vigorously the scanty restoratives they carried with them. After aiding them all they could, the detective and sheriff went in search of the man. They walked up near the wounded man and found him lying, soaked in his own blood, with all the horrors of accursed damned plainly portrayed in his contorted features, cursing God and man, as the froth oozed from his fast-moving lips. The sheriff walked back to the old woman and asked her if she wanted to see her husband for the last time, but, with a fresh out roar, she screamed:

"No! No! He ain't no husbin uv mine! I hate 'im; take him away. I wan'ter leave here—take me off. I been a-fearin' uv dis a long time, but I cudn't git erwa'.' All I want is that book what that gal had jes' afore you all cum."

He went to where she told him to look and

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was much surprised to see a beautifully bound Bible.

As he handed it to her, he asked whose it was. After some hesitation and parleying, she finally pointed to a spot off from the house, saying:

"A gal from way over thar was buried there."

The two men walked in the direction she pointed, not far from the den, where was the grave of three of his victims. They made further search, and found many evidences of his villainous outlawry. Despairing in their efforts to revive Dolly, they began to make preparations to get away.

Nina was so frightened with the appearance of the inmates and the frightful, awful associations she had with them, that after she laid Dolly's head in George's lap she went to get some water to bathe Dolly's face, and as she walked over the house and about the grounds, the weird, haunted appearance of the place, with the graves of the dead man's victims, together with the sight of his ghastly, convulsed, still upturned face was awful to Nina, but not a circumstance to the deeds of crime that had been perpetrated and the agony and suffering of the helpless victims, whose cries for help were heard only by the ghostly, flickering shadows.

"Oh! my poor darling, the very knowledge of being here is enough to take your precious life."

As they were parleying just what and how to manage, and how Dolly could survive the trip,

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the sun was hid and the loud report of thunder, with the roaring wind, warned them that they would have to seek shelter.

Lifting their lifeless charge tenderly, they repaired to the shelter of the dreaded den.

The storm grew more fierce, and lasted threateningly for some time. While they were closed in this rude hovel, their eyes feasted sumptuously on the curios and odd relics hanging scatteringly on the walls.

As they sat later on, after a tedious, tiresome journey, in which Nina and George held Dolly as comfortably as possible in their arms, continuously administering a few drops of brandy, and watching her pulse, for hours and hours. Just after noon they arrived before the home of Dolly, where the unconscious mother pleaded for her darling.

The pale, heavy-traced, immobile countenance of the anxious father, as he gazed upon the apparently lifeless form of Dolly, smoothed and made her presentable for the physician, his head dropped low, his lips quivered, and a heavy groan escaped his broken, aching heart. His hands dropped, his eyes closed for a moment, and he knelt by the couch, laying his face close to his darling's, and fervently prayed that she be spared.

"Oh, God! this is bitter. If it be Thy will, oh, God, spare her. Oh, Lord! I humbly beg that she live to see her broken-hearted father."

The doctor entered. A look of horror and

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sympathy spread over his face, as he gazed at the swollen, purple-spotted face, so unlike the sweet, beautiful one that smiled on him a last good-by as she started on her fateful journey. He calmed himself when he saw the gaze of the father watching him so closely, and he made a thorough examination. The watchers stood with bated breath to hear the opinion of the trusted and honored physician. He sat quietly for a long time with head hung, his chin in his hand, his eyes riveted on her, as she lay so still, with no sign of life except when an occasional shudder or quiver would pass over her, unconscious of her surroundings and apparently of everything.

"Oh, doctor, do tell us! Will she survive this, will she ever know us, or open her eyes?" asked Nina, as she dropped on her knees, with her face resting on Dolly's head, and kissing her repeatedly.

"Ask me one question at a time, my child. I can answer all in one, and that is this: I can't tell just now scarcely anything. This swoon is the effect of some strong opiate, given evidently with intent to kill. If this proves unsuccessful, then I can better advise you more intelligently. But at present the vital part is her care," said he.

"That is my pleasure. Oh, do let me, please," looking imploringly at the father. "I am a comparative stranger, but I love her. Oh! I love her."

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"Madam, though you are a stranger, as it were, my darling has mentioned your name frequently in her letters, and your kindness to my wife before this journey—especially your loving interest in her—binds you with an everlasting gratitude, and endears you so sincerely and tenderly that I commit her willingly to your care, with help at your command."

"Thank you, sir. Ah, I could not bear to be torn from my darling." As she rose, the father beckoned her and led the way to Dolly's beautiful rooms, that she might understand the arrangements necessary.

As she came near Dolly, she looked up, and saw George standing a few paces off, his arms folded, the touching sadness of his face a mere hint of the torn and bleeding heart.

"Come, if you like," said she, motioning him to a chair at the couch.

He at once obeyed, sitting with her hand in his, caressing it. He silently bent over and planted loving kisses on her wan cheek.

"Oh, my love! You must live, I can't give you up," said he, as Nina bent down beside him, with tears streaming down her cheek. They looked up as the father returned. Walking straight to George, with outstretched hand, he said:

"This is a cruel fate that brings us together, Mr. Allwane. My son, oh, don't let her leave us!" Still holding his hand, he led George back to the bedside. "This to me is worse than death,"

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with his hand on the strong shoulder of George; "from appearances, she has, oh, what has this frail little angel been forced to bear? If she had been crushed 'neath the iron rails, or murdered, I could have borne it, but oh, my God! the sight will kill me," and the old father sobbed as a child, leaning on the shoulder of one whose heart was bleeding, but forced himself to be calm, that he might console the one who leaned on him so dependently, in this dark and trying hour.

"Oh, God! why hast Thou forsaken me? All this life holds dear for me is stricken in my arms, and I am helpless to relieve."

"My dear sir, if there is such a thing in this life as one human suffering for another, or the bonds of love and sympathy being so strong that the very life's blood is drawn for another, is a very feeble expression for what I feel for you in this most heart-rending and lonely inexpressible depths of sorrow that man was ever called on to bear. The fathomless depths of God's merciful arrangements of the dispensation of the thoughts of His children in their midnight hour of sorrow, that in the midst of the great black waste that so mercilessly enwrapped him the bright star of hope penetrated and whispered be of good cheer, don't despair, there is yet hope."

George, with all the strength of his indomitable will, felt the silent sweet face, so unconscious, with no complaint other than a pitiful

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groan now and then. He looked at the father with a deep sigh, and for the first few moments his grief was uncontrollable, when he said:

"Do you think, sir, that your wound of her is deeper than mine, though you are her father? My whole life lies in her, my love, oh, my precious, innocent darling!"

Nina came in and had her moved to her room. George left on the early train, with the assurance of Nina that if she became rational before the time he was to come back, she would at once notify him.

He arrived home in the nick of time, being met at the train by some of his most influential supporters with the news of a scheme so maliciously black and deceptive that he was at a loss for a short time just what method to pursue. The final election was almost at hand—only a few days away—and realizing their doubtful results, their effort was a bold, daring, maliciously detrimental one.

The effective plan with which George and his sympathizers met and thwarted the concocting treachery, was proving a grand success, as the speakers and electioneers came and reported a few days afterward. As he sat for a few words with Aunt Betty, the first in several days, he told her everything, from the first evening of the receipt of the news of Dolly's non-appearance at her home, giving her a minute description, as they were deeply interested.

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Ben handed him a message. He tore it open hastily, read it, jerked out his watch, and said: "I must catch this train."

Ben had the horses harnessed while he made some hasty preparations. Kissing Aunty Betty, who was in tears, he ran out, jumped into the buggy, and started for the train. Just as the horses dashed up to the depot, the train slowly pulled out. He swung himself on the rear platform, amid shouts from the onlookers, who shouted George Allwane could not be left in anything.

"Oh, thank Heaven, George, dear, she is conscious; I knew you would come, so I asked permission of the doctor if you could."

"Oh, the doctor—to the mischief—— I must, I can't wait."

"Yes, but you must wait."

"Dolly, oh, Dolly! The last few hours have dragged as a year."

"You can see her on these conditions."

"What are they? I will do anything you say, only be quick."

The old father could not hide a faint smile the played around his mouth, as he looked on the tall, handsome, manly form, so strong and honorable, but in his eager, anxious anticipations more like the earnest pleadings of an excited, delighted child.

As Nina led the way, George caught the arm of the father, and silently they went in.

It was the second evening since he received

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the message, and when Nina sent it they were greatly encouraged, but she grew weaker alarmingly fast the day of his arrival. Hoping to encourage her, Nina told her of his coming, and she bravely fought for strength, silently sending her fervent intercessions that she might once more see his dear face and have him near her. She knew, from the bright smile on Nina's face, that something unusual had happened.

Turning her calm, sweet face toward the door to ask what it was, she uttered a scream of joy, as she reached out her arms with an angelic smile of delight on her face.

The father, with tears of happiness streaming down his face, stood with bowed head nearby, while Nina, at her side, laughed and cried alternately.

As George, with both her hands in his, knelt by her bed, speaking tender, loving assurances, and the sweet happiness she anticipated of her hasty and perfect recovery; how his heart bled when they discovered her disappearance, a shudder ran visibly over her frail form as she looked at him steadily for a moment, and said: "Kiss me, dear George. I can't be with you a great while longer. My prayers have been answered by the dear Lord, who is holding out his hand to bear me to a beautiful, shining home. Ah! how happy we would have been."

"Don't! don't! my darling Dolly; you will soon be well, and our happiness will have just

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begun. Oh, don't say those words! You will kill me."

"Oh, no! my noble, true George, you must not grieve; I must leave you. Our happiness in this world has been sweet. I can't tell just where I have been or how I came to be there, but the sweetest and most comforting thought when the chief of the den was not there, and I could have reason enough to think of your parting word, and the sweet, confiding assurance of our bright and happy home, of all that I hoped to be—the helping hand in your many, trying, heavy burdens, and vexing trials. The precious plans I had for your aid to a beautiful, noble height of success in your aspirations to aid and relieve, these and the consuming desire to be able to look in the face of my precious father and mother, was the strength that saved my reason. Oh, my God! I am ready, I am so tired."

Nina hastened with a strengthening cordial, and begged her to rest, not talk more.

"No! no! my ministering angel, I must hasten; God gave me this precious opportunity," pulling her down, kissing her repeatedly, saying:

"I leave my work to you, my precious angel. You have been so kind and good; I love you, oh, I love you. As I look back on the short journey I have made, I gaze on the exquisite beauties and loveliness of our surroundings of my Eden. My precious father was as happy as I over the numerous opportunities that we were so bountifully blessed with. There were no

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clouds to cast their shadows over the charming, fascinating pleasure and the sweet love of my friends, as I see them in our exciting amusement—first on the broad green campus, filled with the happy voices, as the aspirations of a bright, anticipated future loomed high and broad, including the crowning, blissful thought, as I faintly see them as they pass in smiling throngs before my eyes, and the sweetest of all is the place of our meeting; you remember.”

“Oh, Dolly, I can’t bear this; you wring my already aching heart. God will spare you. Oh, my darling, we can’t give you up!”

“Yes, my dear loved ones, I am going only a little while before you, even if you spend a long time here. I leave the precious work of our mutual programme in your dear hands. There is a glorious work for both of you.”

Tears were streaming thick and fast down each sorrowful face, as they listened to the last words. She looked from one to the other, and long at her father, who shook with grief.

“Why don’t mother come to me?”

They were thinking just how to break the news to her, when, seeing a smile come over her wan face, and looking up at her outstretched hands, and there like a ghost stood her mother, with a look of terror and inquisitiveness. She stood for a second or more, and said:

“Darling, I have found you. I have been hunting for you,” and, reeling, she fell into the arms of her husband, who sprang to catch her.

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Dolly made no comment, she was too far gone to notice it. She talked as though her mother was standing by her; such sweet good-bys, with a smile of resignation on her face, beautiful in its transparent reflection of a pure and noble thought that wafted her soul to a home where all is happiness and love. With her hand in George's, where he still knelt, the other thrown out across the prostrate form of her mother, with the father bowed with distracting grief, she quietly breathed her last.

As the group silently sobbed, each with their heart too full for utterance, George was lost in the bitterness of his own grief.

Thus they lingered an hour or more when the good old physician came, blustering with a cheerful

"Well, I wonder how my girl is now?"

He entered the door by this time.

"Oh, my God! I can't believe my own eyes."

He stood in utter astonishment, rooted to the spot some time, finally from the familiarity of such scenes regaining his composure. Going quietly to the pitiful form of the poor old father, he patted him on the back, calling him by his name, and said: "I know you feel that you can't bear this, but you have done your duty and your conscience is clear. You have your wife left, and that is a blessing."

He raised his face to his friend with an expression of intolerable pain.

As the doctor said in a soothing, sympathetic

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voice, "come with me; come," he raised the helpless form of his patient in his fatherly arms, and bore it to the room she came from. When the supernatural vision and strength led her noiselessly to the bedside of her darling, Nina moved noiselessly to the bed, unclasped the hands of the stricken lover, pressed her lips affectionately to the silent cold ones of her lost, dearly beloved Dolly, she said:

"Poor, dear George, I know that this is a dark, gloomy appearing future, with the brightest star of which all other objects were of minor importance and in whose smiling, sweet face and encouraging looks and words were an inspiration that urged your aim and ambition to higher ideals, and now you have the sweet consolation of her confidence to still strengthen you in your lofty and noble plans by which your charitable indulgence will be the means of breaking the fetters of inexperience and ignorance, holding the gate of opportunity ajar that all who are inclined may partake freely. That is a bright, urgent, appealing call that is still broad and bright. With the knowledge of her anxiety to aid, the ever-whispering farewell request is a precious, consoling monument that you must wrap your lonely and tattered garments of sorrow adorning your heart and body anew with a garb of humble submissiveness, resigned to God's all-wise and precious will. Looking forward to the gathering of a harvest that will have

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a crown of 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant.'"

He raised his sorrowful face, as the hand of the good doctor took him by the arm, and they started to the library. Stopping suddenly, he turned around, stepped back and pressed one long, lingering kiss on the silent, still lips.

A groan, painful to hear, and that spoke of a soul bowed low with a heavy grief, came from him. Nina hastened to the bedside of the mother, and stood there with the doctor, through the long, weary, sorrowful hours of the night, fearing every hour the mother would follow in the quick steps of the one snatched so unexpectedly.

As the first faint streaks of the new day spread the east, and the night, with a sorrow as dark and effective, gathered her gloomy folds and noiselessly passed, bidding welcome the bright, new day, radiant in its shining garments, with an enormous diamond on her fair brow, as the first little golden beam fluttered through the latticed blinds and fell across the motionless sufferer, a moan escaped her lips, and the old friend and physician straightened himself with a look of hope gleaming from his weary eyes, and, while a faint smile played around his closely compressed lips, he said:

"Thank God, there is hope." A light sound at the door called the doctor. He went, came quickly back, and motioned to Nina, who went.

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There stood George, with a message calling him home at once.

Nina remained and watched at the bedside of the bereaved mother until she was out of danger. Her recovery was slow, and the physician ordered her husband to take her and travel for two years, that being the only hope for a permanent recovery. They persuaded, pleaded and offered anything to Nina if she would only stay, first praying that she remain as their own dear child, then offering her a handsome salary if she would live with them.

"My dear, sweet angel of comfort, don't leave me; oh, I can't bear it. Do stay; you shall have everything to make you happy."

Nina laid her head in Mrs. Dupree's lap, with tears in her eyes, and said:

"If you could only know how sincerely I thank you for your kindness, how truly and earnestly thankful I am that it was my sweet privilege to be with you, whom I have learned to love dearly, but, my dear, I must hasten to my darling mother, who needs me more than you do now. She is lonely without me, and her strength is fast failing."

She went on, telling of her anticipated work with the children, what great things she had accomplished in that special work, but did not hint, or in the least intimate, that she was their sole dependence for bread. She left with the promise that she would visit them often when they returned home from aboard.

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CHAPTER XXII.

George found Mr. Crookshanks waiting for him in a fever of excitement.

"We are on his track now, by Joe," said he. "He is undoubtedly the slickest villain I ever tried to tree, but we are on a warm trail. He has eluded the officials by jumping from one place to another. I tell you one thing sure."

"What is it?" asked George anxiously, looking at him.

"I'll be jumper, if I had a girl to make me look as old and horridly ugly as you look, with that woebegone, hang-down-the-mouth expression that you are bearing around here, expecting people to send you to the house of law."

"I don't ever want to get to one, for I am not as strong as you are, and I know full well I would turn it upside down."

"By jingo, Allwane, you are sinfully ugly, or you have swapped faces with some one, and got badly bit in the bargain," said he laughingly.

George's first impulse was to resist such brazen impertinence. The hot blood rushed to his face, as the friend whirled around and laughed outright.

"Ah! now you feel better; don't you, old fellow?" said he, as a smile crept over George's haggard face. Patting him on the shoulder, he

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said: "I knew you would be indignant, but you must be reversed. You have had enough of the dark side at present. You don't look the same man, Heaven knows."

"This truly is the blackest, most heinous of crimes that I ever came in contact with. Truly we are reverting back to barbarism or to a descendant of the demon, who has, by some ill wind, been dropped in our midst."

"Not recently," said George, "judging from evidence gathered while in and around the den. The victims have been many, and their fate more horrible than this one. My aim is now centered in the conviction of the perpetrators of this heinous crime."

"I don't doubt but that is the easiest job you have undertaken in a long time. First we have to throw that old woman out. I am keen to know the fiend who took her there," said Crookshanks, as they turned to walk off.

George had not gone far when he was called by a group of men. Every man was so interested now in the election day, that they had no time for anything but discussion or heated argument. They felt highly hopeful; so did the opposing ones. Truly there had never been in a county so much earnest enthusiasm or so many anxious to eliminate the rotten corruption that was sapping the vitality of the people, who, if their legitimate income was conscientiously managed, they would be one of the most prosperous counties in the state. This state of affairs had

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existed so long and the graft had become so bold that the managers of the affairs at this fountain head knew no limit to their deceptive means of gratifying their greed.

The morning of the election dawned bright and glorious. No cloud appeared; the sun shone with all its golden splendor, spreading its gladdening spirit of light and warmth over this mass of eager, anxious people.

George was an inspiration to his many supporters. His quiet, impressive bearing, the expression of intense interest was a halo of enthusiasm akin to sacredness, so profound was their confidence in him. The realization of this prominent fact to him was a pleasure, but he told Aunt Betty, as they sat near each other in their nook of quiet and communion of confidence and love: "I never felt more incompetent and unworthy in my life, dear aunty. This is the grandest reward I covet; if I go down in defeat, I can carry with me the prize that man should feel most honored, yes, above every earthly victory, the esteem and utmost confidence of his fellow man."

"Hurrah for Allwane! Three cheers for our boy! Hurrah for Allwane!" came the shouts from the anxious throng, which stood by the receiving office until the final count of the most remote polling place was heard from.

Then they hurried on, a shouting, happy throng, to George's home.

As George and Aunt Betty heard the shouts,

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a smile played over George's handsome, noble features. He stooped and kissed the proud face of his aunty, moved the chair in comfortable view of the front entrance, and calmly met the throng at the front door.

After the many congratulations, they told him he was "elected by an overwhelming majority—a perfect landslide."

George assured them of his sincere appreciation of their confidence and trust, and prayed that with their continued, hearty coöperation, of the many beneficial improvements they hoped to accomplish.

The consternation of and surprising disappointment of the rash and unpardonable stigmas they had thrust so maliciously, but though they were defeated, they knew that while the opportunities of the privileged ones would be eliminated and purged of all imperfection, as far as was possible, that every individual would have an impartial and honorable reckoning. The night was far spent when the jubilant, victorious crowd began to repair to their homes, and as the last ones had gone, and George turned, tired with an indescribable peculiar sense of gratification, mingled keenly with a pang of incompetency and humble thankfulness that in the distribution of his urgent efforts he was instrumental in breaking the galling barriers that formed a line of division in a big family that should be at peace and harmony, thereby reap-

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ing mutually the bountiful blessings poured upon them.

He did not close his eyes for sleep all night, and, as he walked early toward his office, drinking deeply the pure, fresh air of a clear, bright morning, he leisurely walked on, busily absorbed in his own thoughts, he was attracted by a cheerful greeting.

"Hello! How are you this morning? I have been watching and chasing this road for the last hour, in hopes of a glimpse of your smiling face."

"Do you expect a man to be roaming around all hours of the night, when he is everything but a detective?" said George, as he joined Mr. Crookshanks, who was seated on the grass under an oak by the side of the long avenue that led to the Allwane home.

"What news have you this morning?"

"I have here the date of the trial, and also a message notifying me of the arrest of Mr. Sapp, alias Banks, at your disposal."

"So you have him, have you?"

"No; but a d—n straight line on him."

"Bravo! You are a shining jewel, Crookshanks. Would to heaven you had been here long ago. When does the trial of Simpkins come up?"

"That's just what I have been so anxious to see you about; it's to-day, and the case promises to be a most interesting one. I have to be there,

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you know, so I came to ask you to join me. Will you?"

George was silent for a few moments, then said: "Yes, I see no reason why I can't."

They hurried back, ordered the horses, and were off.

The case was a notorious one, and of widespread interest, his reputation being well aired. As they entered the court room the judge was charging the jury, a pathetic and noble charge, still in substance condemning.

The attorney for the defense went to the prisoner and said a few words in an undertone. The accused shook his head and replied in the same low tone.

When the trial was just ready to hear the evidence, the man slowly rose with an air of suppressed emotion, looking the judge steadily in the face, his voice low and constrained. With a strong effort, he finally spoke calmly and with a clear, audible voice:

"Honorable Judge and Gentlemen, there is no necessity of pleading or prolonging this trial. The convictions of a man's conscience when in the darkened gloom of a prison cell whip and lash him mercilessly, and the future looms before him darker still, while the demons of remorse crowd like vultures, mocking and hissing at the demon and the lost opportunities of a future once as bright as any man could ever attain.

"When I first grew to manhood, my indulgent

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parents humored every whim, encouraging every wish and desire. Ah! my God, as I see those proud, beaming faces, as I ran up the steps, when in my middle teens, with my first honors won by hard study, I believed, or was told quite often, that I was a very precocious boy, and made rapid strides, being ready for college at the age of seventeen. I went successfully and rapidly through, finishing with honors in the year of my majority.

"The friend of my bosom, one whom I revered, wielded an influence over me when I was absent from him, that was appalling, indeed. Ofttimes I have shuddered at the absolute submission to his deceptive, nay, treacherous will. I would not rest until I had him near me. In the meantime, even as far back as my early boyhood, I was devotedly attached to the most divinely angelic little girl that was ever boy's or man's precious privilege to love. Her father was a successful banker and merchant, and after I had been home a few weeks he offered me a place of trust and honor. Then I was as pure as any man the sun ever shone on. Shortly after I accepted this position, I was instrumental in securing my friend a position in my own home town.

"With my prosperity came the desire to claim my own love. Oh, the bliss of those days, compared to the hell of now, with the broad, dark, yawning gulf of hell between, with a thousand mocking devils grinning at me!"

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He paused, dropped his head a minute, while a loud groan escaped him; finally he recovered, and, with an expression of pain and anguish on his pale, set features, continued:

"Her father became aware of our attachment for each other, and, for a cause then unknown to me, seriously objected. We postponed the union, hoping I might overcome his displeasure.

"My friend was not as fortunate as I in his financial affairs, but being a handsome man, became the courted beau of the times, and, of course, soon used more money than he could earn.

"His first escapade was to earn it gambling. Ah, how well I remember the first time I ever touched a card. How he jeered and ridiculed me for being reluctant in my decision. Oh, my God, had I only had strength to have withstood him. We won that night, and, of course, were wholly enthused, also winning the second. The next time we doubled our means, and after then we lost."

A heavy groan escaped his quivering lips.

"He then threw his coil around me, urging that I manipulate a false entry in the books, as I had the supervision of the bank and mercantile affairs. It finally seemed a very easy affair to accomplish it. In the meantime several months had passed, and my love grew to a consuming fire, and I persuaded my darling to consent to get married, regardless of her father's

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wishes, vowing she should never have the slightest cause of remorse. Our luck changed, and we were on the winning side, but he could not stop, and I could not resist his influence. My urgent persuasions convinced my darling that she would make our lives unhappy on account of her father's unfounded aversion to me, so one beautiful evening she met me at the side entrance of the broad grounds that surrounded her palatial home. We leisurely strolled to the home of the minister and were joined in the bonds of eternal bliss. Oh, oh," he moaned, "the damnable curse of the word friend is a mocking, hollow hell, that any sane man should spurn. This is an accursed waste of time, gentlemen, that I am asking you to traverse with me, but I must speak. I will not keep one single incident hidden; I ask no leniency, I want no respite, I want to have an end to this damnable torture. " Raising a glass, he eagerly drained the last drop, and asked for more water; his very soul seemed, as he continued, on fire.

"She wrote a sweet little note to her father, begging his forgiveness, telling what we had done, hoping he would relent; but he never answered it, and in a little over a year, we were blessed with the sweet face of our first precious darling. With a world of sunshine and gladness in my soul, and a heart brimming full of good resolutions, I walked into the office. Ah, men! you who have the bright side to view, who have the cream of this world at your finger tips with

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no monster crime nagging your every breath, you can't conceive the height nor depth of abject misery and damnable tormenting memories, as they rise from the black sea of dead and lost opportunities. As I opened my books and started to work, I spied an envelope addressed to me. Tearing it open, I saw the words that sent me unrestrained, headlong, at a rapid pace, into an abyss of unredeemable ruin. My very being rose in bitter rebellion to the grave injustice, and, having the keys in my hand, I maneuvered around, apparently gathering my belongings, and heaped to my already enormous pile of dishonesty and theft, another crime preëminent to the others, and disabled the firm almost to ruin. As good luck would have it, I had left the assistant's books in bad shape, and when the last crime was suspicioned, he, too, was hurled out. He was as innocent as an infant. When I left the office the whole force was discharged on suspicion, just as I was. Having no convicting evidence, I escaped. I took to drink, with the other crimes. Soon my child was taken. My darling wife never murmured, but silently withered. I could see that the grief was sapping her very life, and, at her earnest desire, we moved from there, hoping to escape this friend of mine, but soon he followed in my tracks; I moved again. Several years now had elapsed, and I had buried two of my darling angels. God in his patience became insulted at my repeated lying, and turned His face from me, and I have

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since been a constant companion of the king of devils. When I came to Allwanesville, my dear wife was brighter and happier than I had seen her for a long time. When the sky was brightest, there were no temptations to lure me out, and our little darling was strong and bright. A bookkeeper was needed, and this friend of mine appeared on the scene. The weak man of me urged me to go, to get away, but the demon mockingly ridiculed the idea. So I stayed there ere the wane of many moons. We had concocted the plan for which I am here.

"He managed the books, having become an experienced crook, so I agreed to his scheme. He gave me one thousand dollars to burn the main machinery building. My home was near the building. My only child left living was in his first throes of the dread disease of which he lingered for an unusual length of time for a child of his age. As his mother was occupied in caring for him in one of the weak, fretful spells, I was sitting on the side porch that looked directly near, and in front of the building. I did not intend to consummate the deed until nightfall, but the awful groans and suffering of my only precious, idolized darling cut my heart, I realizing that ere long, he, too, would be taken. All the strength of the demons that possessed me rose up in a terrible, revengeful rage, and a burning, uncontrollable desire to destroy something, I knew not what, only I had to do something, and in this frenzied state of delirium I

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moved near the edge of the porch and struck a match, leaned low down, stuck it to a saturated cord, which I had cautiously placed from there to the object of my foolish, fancied revenge. Moving in quickly, I sat near an open window by the bedside, and gloatingly watched the tiny blaze creep slowly but surely on. I was happy. I feared no intrusion, for the hands were at their noon meal, leaving no one in this particular part of the building."

He looked steadily to the side, and caught the eyes of Mr. Crookshanks, who sat in profound amazement. They looked at each other for an instant, when an expression of profound contempt and disgust settled on the detective's face, while the prisoner had the appearance of absolute indifference.

As he stood with his still-set features, the narration progressed, and the recital of the chain of deception, destruction, murderous intention, portrayed their impressions on the silent, awed audience.

A murmur of disgust ran over the people, as they moved uneasily in their seats and looked at him, as he continued:

"As the blaze reached the building, a loud explosion rent the air, and the shattered fragments of a substantial structure covered the earth. The screams of the frightened women, the wild, excited shouts of the men, as they came rapidly from their numerous homes, viewing the angry flames, that was sweet pleasure to me,

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when I thought the whole plant was going to be destroyed. The president of the business was said to be a generous, kind gentleman, and when he was carried from the scene unconscious, I shouted for joy, the insurance on the plant, I learned afterwards from my friend, having expired a few days previous. Very soon after the business was again in working order. The daughter of the president came home from college, and, being lonely, spent a great deal of her time in the office of her father, being the only child of an extremely doting family, was indulged in her slightest whim. She met the man who everybody loved and respected. At once her infatuation ripened into a blinding, jealous love, that was terrible to think of. One night this friend of mine and I met to consider plans to again bleed the firm. Our first attempt had proved so extremely unprofitable. We were far out from the street, secluded by a dense clump of low bushes and trees, when suddenly a person or man apparently passed us. We were surprised, but thought it some one of the laborers from the pine forest, who came in for something.

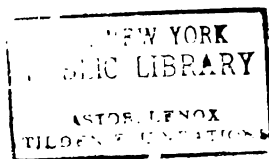
"Miss Vining's schoolmate and dear friend had arrived a few days previous, and in her honor was given an elaborate reception. She discovered after her arrival that she was the betrothed bride of Mr. Allwane. The knowledge of this at once angered Miss Vining, who was of a deceptive nature. Seeing them, as they smiled

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on each other during the evening, was to her a vision that should not continue. The love she bore her school friend turned instantly into a bitter hatred, and from that minute on she existed in an atmosphere of excited jealous destruction. She silently slipped a note in my friend's hand, the contents of which desired an interview at a designated place and hour, threatening the divulgence of some of the deeds I have just narrated, and the hint of one he had kept a secret from me until then, that was of the marriage and desertion of a sweet little woman several years ago; being deeply in love with a young lady of this place, he feared her. At the appointed time she divulged her desire—that she would keep his past and pay him a stipulated amount and encourage his suit in every conceivable way, if he would remove the barrier between her and the object of her distracted, thoroughly consuming love, a love that knew no reason. The depths of hell held no conceivable means of destruction too deplorable that she would hesitate an instant to employ to consummate her treacherous design. As usual, my friend Sapp was too cowardly to perpetrate the means of destruction or removal. So he hurried to me, agreeing to divide the spoils, saying I might exact any amount I saw fit to name, to compensate me for the performance of the deed. All agreed, and I knew of an out-of-the-way, uninhabitable corner of the sixteenth section of the county, where an old outlaw had a secluded



She felt a firm hand grasp her shoulder, then all was darkness,
(Open of 16th Section.)—P. 325.



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den. I followed this happy, innocent young woman, soon to be a happy bride, who had just left the bedside of my sick child, to the Junction, where she was waiting for the train that would carry her to the sick mother, who was anxiously waiting for her. As she roamed out to the park, and sat, judging from her sad expression and the tears that fell thick and fast down her cheeks, a demon urged me on. I seized her, bound, gagged and chloroformed her."

A deep, painful groan escaped, as the audience looked at the haggard face of George, with his head bent low.

"I hastened to a rig I had ready, and drove hurriedly to the place of keeping. Getting there, I told the old man that she was as crazy as a bat, as the old adage went, cautioning him not to listen to her protestations, realizing that when she came to herself she would try to convince them of the lying fraud. We had no intention of injury, only of removing the barrier, if possible, but if this effort was ineffective, then remove with death. When I came back, she was happy. Ah, I can see the smile of triumph beaming brightly on her face, as she placed the agreed amount in my hand. I later returned to her a photograph of the fair, innocent woman, with the eyes cut out and the bold outline of a casket drawn across the form, assuring her that her way was unobstructed. My friend, the next few hours, matured the plan whereby we relieved the firm of a few thousand, he being doubly

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guilty, in that he forged five hundred for the murderous daughter."

He stopped for breath, and the judge eyed him keenly for a few moments, and as a wave of restless agitation swept the room, one yelled in a loud voice: "Hang the devil!" Another said: "No, that's too good for him; burn him to the stake!" Order was finally restored, and the man started on, as the judge said, in a commanding, disgusted voice:

"Truly, if man was ever transformed into a brazen, impudent devil, you are the most eminently successful; nothing but the howling, loathing obedience of a devilish bondage that wrecked and blasted the once apparently human blood that coursed your villainous body has evidently gloried in the inexpressible torture and destruction of those who innocently fell victims to your hellish revenge. Black, indeed, must be the world of your existence, with a heart and mind so centered enthusiastically on the one absorbing thought of the satisfying pleasure of the most cowardly, detestable disposition that ever existed in a sneaking, contemptible cur that you are. In consideration of the condemning confession, fresh from your treacherous lips, and in view of the broad area of inexpressible sorrow and pain, directly and indirectly heaped on the innocent ones, either of itself an unpardonable crime, I reverse for once the power of judgment and place in your hands the disposition of a score of crimes unparalleled in the an-

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nals of civilization, an admitted entrance to the fiery pit of depravity—depravity that danced and laughed happily when the claw-like fingers clutched the innocent, unsuspecting, tender throat of the only daughter of a doting, idolizing mother and father, and who, in the precious goodness of her own heart, had sat by the bedside of your own suffering, fevered child, night after night, day after day, throwing asunder her personal pleasure and social happiness, to minister, comfort and relieve the sick child and the weary mother, whose heart was constantly lashed and bruised, her very life's blood dripping slowly, grieving for a brute in man's clothing. Ah! my God, gentlemen, did you ever confront a deed so appalling, so beautifully deserving the utmost condemnation known to the world of justice. What is your decision?"

The expression of contempt and abject loathing that settled on this stern old judge's immobile countenance was only the reflection of the sea of faces turned to him. The murmur of the audience, as they sat fixed in their places, in rebellious, astounded anger, was dangerously evident of the crucial smouldering excitement. When man is so lost in his wounded sense of an afflicted outrage that the instantaneous cry of the monster revenge is so predominant that the better judgment and the law is set at defiance, and the excited bravery of a thoughtless expression ignites the seething dynamite of anger, and oblivion reigns. The instantaneous glance

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of the thoroughly experienced judge saw that eminent danger was boldly prying for a chance at a moment's warning to bid defiance and assert the right to eliminate the perpetrator of a dastardly, unbearable deed that the refined sense of civilization could not tolerate.

The prisoner stood, like a stone man, his head lowered, his face white and savagely defiant, but he had a sense of the terrible fate, that in an instant more would have been uncontrollable.

The judge said that as there were grounds of leniency in the fact of a confession, and in consideration of the convicting evidence given that otherwise would have taken time to ferret, the court was of this consideration, in that the said court and the citizens would be relieved of a burden that had been a source of terrible, unbearable grief, and to remunerate this one spark of charity in his blackened, sinful soul, I recommend you to the mercies of a just God, and to the penitentiary at hard labor for life. Every eye was riveted on this servant of the devil. As he slowly raised his head, looking straight at the judge, he said clearly: "Thank you, judge; you are kind."

The officer marched him instantly away.

Mr. Crookshank touched George on the arm, and motioned him to follow. He went mechanically. When they gained the open, he said: "Quick, we must secure our other birds. If

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the news of this confession reaches that demon-ess, our cake will all be dough."

They hurriedly procured the legal documents that were to consummate the final conviction of the two wretched suspected accomplices in one sense, and more than guilty of the other.

By some unseen, unintelligible, sympathetic current, the condemning confession reached the wretched, writhing soul of Delia, who had so recovered that she was able to sit up.

With the horrors of her cursed, sinful life spread bare on the walls of her memory, she sat, at the time her treacherous deeds were being laid bare to the world, by an open window, with the mocking relics of a lost and wasted life, aged and gray in disreputable sin, but yet in the prime of youth with the rare opportunities of means, and loving parents to inspire a life of sunshine, as the choking sense of exposure occurred to her, and the terrible doom that even her justifying, bitter depravity pictured, as she met the condemning frown and the cold, pitiless gaze of the faces most familiar to her.

A wild, frightful terror seized her, and the brazen, impudent, scoffing demon that held her in its iron grasp at the thought of a merciless discovery, strangled and tore the grasp that tried to hold it, and fled, leaving a mere shadow of womanhood, with her robes so bedrabbled in disgrace and blackened shame, that rather than face a tribunal of justice and bear the marks

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left by the fleeing devils, she excitedly called to the maid, standing in sight in the yard, gave her a note and some small change, urging her to a hasty return.

Grabbing her writing desk, she wrote her mother and father a penitent farewell. When, a few hours later, the arresting officer, with a few curious idlers, gained admittance through the excitement and consternation that so prevailed, to his scorning disappointment, he found his anticipated prisoner in the agonies of a lunging, tearing death, fighting the imaginary, crouching in terrible fear, her wild-set eyes so bleared and strained as though they would burst from their swollen sockets, her whole frame rigid with cruel convulsions, the bloody froth oozing from her clinched teeth.

"Tain't half as bad as she ought to suffer," said the disappointed officer. "She ought to have thought of this when she was a-stealin' all of that money frum her ole pa to hire the devil of a feller the judge jest sent up fur life," said he.

The doctor, who was doing everything in his power to relieve and save a suffering soul, said: "Oh, I deplore this awful shadow, thrown so mercilessly on the white hairs and bent heads of this honorable old couple, now on the declining side of life, after a struggle for years, battling ever to stay the finger of shame, with ambitious cravings, exalted aspirations and ideals centered in this one idol and perfect light,

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to sit high in the temple of their estimation. Oh, man, can't you save them a portion of the terrible, heart-breaking truth? The grave will have robbed the prison cell of a victim. Let her deeds go with her as shining lights on her long, dark pilgrimage to the city of the damned."

"I reckon you are right, doctor; hit won't do no good to throw more trouble and grief on the old man's white head."

The officer walked out, and, as he came to a group of men discussing the exciting confession, he told them of what had occurred. As George and Mr. Crookshanks passed, he excitedly told them about Delia.

George made no comment, and the other jestingly said: "Pshaw, that's too good and e-a-s-y for such a ripe exposure."

Time has flown on swift wings since the events opened. As Aunt Betty sits in her accustomed place, her sweet face much older and more wrinkled, it marks the steps of time. As the last faint glow of a golden sunset casts its mellow light over the face of a busy, bustling earth, the restful calm that ushers in the gloaming shades of night, she looked up from her work, with a peaceful, happy smile, as Nina and George come in, with his arm lovingly around her, and she looks proudly up into his face, with an expression beaming with profound admiration and love. He stooped, kissing her tenderly.

Aunt Betty said: "Well, I'll declare, I

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thought your honeymoon would be over some time. Here it has been nearly two years since you were married, and I do believe you grow more in love every day."

They seated themselves near her, and looked up smilingly at her and answered: "Our honeymoon will last always."

Nina and George had just returned from her mother's, who now was happy in the continued service of her Lord, but was more comfortably situated at home.

After Nina had been home from her stay of mercy to Dolly and her sick mother, she was notified of a handsome sum at her disposal in the bank.

She and George were united in their mutual sympathy and grief. Her first thoughts when she received the notice was for happiness and comfort of her mother and brother.

She at once had a neat, comfortable little home built for them, and sent her brother off to complete his education. Very often the tears fell fast from the eyes of the loved ones as they speak of the terrible deeds perpetrated in the "DEN OF THE SIXTEENTH SECTION."

THE END.

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